

Neath Port Talbot Homelessness Review 2018



Part 1 - Introduction, methodology and policy/legal context

1.1 Introduction and purpose of this document

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires all Welsh Councils to review how they are preventing and responding to homelessness. Any review is then expected to inform a strategy which will frame the direction for services over the following years.

This document details the findings of a review of existing services within Neath Port Talbot (NPT). It not only focusses on its housing services, but also explores the policy context in which they exist and whether the response to homelessness is complimentary to the wider strategic direction within the area.

It is not the purpose of this document to recommend a way forward. The aim of this document is to present the evidence, discuss and explore potential developments and allow the strategy it informs to make recommendations on policy direction.

1.2 Methodology

An independent Housing & Homelessness Consultant with extensive experience of the pan-Wales homelessness strategic arena was commissioned to undertake the review so as to ensure optimal objectivity. The review aimed to ensure a wide range of input by not only talking to those who are involved in the assessment of homelessness and managing it but also stakeholders who work in other policy areas that impact upon homelessness. The review process has included:

- Utilising existing information on homelessness which is available through the statistics collected for the Welsh Government (WG);
- exploring the national policy context in relation to homelessness;
- exploring the local policy context and considered how the delivery of homelessness can complement and reflect it;
- drawing from a specific Supporting People Provider Forum meeting, to which all key multi-agency stakeholders were invited;

- interviewing key representatives from all relevant service areas - including housing/homelessness, social services (adult and children's), social care and housing commissioning, the health board, the private rented sector, the Supporting People team, those working in Community Safety, the substance misuse regional team, the DWP, agencies delivering support and social housing providers; and
- holding a focus group with people who have experienced homelessness.

There were aspects of the findings which influenced how the review developed. Issues/priorities were highlighted, as the interviews were undertaken, and this allowed the review to focus on these areas and consider them in greater depth. Any strategy developed, as we move forward, needs to reflect on the priorities identified.

For the purposes of publishing this document, as required by the WG, any personal and/or sensitive data relating to any specific person or agency has been removed; as have any personal/subjective observations.

In the following section we explore the policy direction around homelessness and the significant new duties that have been introduced by the Act.

1.3 The national policy direction for homelessness

For many years the emphasis in relation to responding to homelessness in Wales has been to focus on how we prevent it. This focus has been advocated by the WG and adopted by Councils and other agencies.

This policy approach has led to services being developed and established, to help people as early as possible in relation to any housing need they have and, wherever possible, work with them to find a solution before it leads to crisis.

In 2015, Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 was implemented to reflect this emphasis on prevention. The Act introduced several new duties. To meet these duties Councils were encouraged to make better use of services which had already been

established. It was very much a key aim of this review to determine if, in NPT, the appropriate services are in place and are meeting the duties introduced.

Following the introduction of the Act, the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) has recently undertaken a review, to establish if the prevention of homelessness was embedded within the culture of Councils in Wales.

The findings suggest that Councils still have some way to go and it states that they “continue to focus on managing people in crisis rather than stop it from happening”⁽ⁱ⁾. The findings of the report have informed this review in relation to the services delivered in NPT.

However, it is not just in the homelessness field that prevention is seen as key. All WG Health, Social Care and Wellbeing policy and legislation is highlighting the need for a more robust and extensive prevention approach. There is enormous potential to develop a synergy around these national policies and their focus on prevention activity, to optimise the effectiveness of homelessness services.

The review needed to reflect upon this and consider how agencies can work better in partnership; not just in relation to preventing homelessness, but in preventing a variety of factors which impact upon individuals’ well-being. All evidence suggests that the more we work in partnership to improve this, the less likely it is that an individual/household will have a housing crisis and fall into homelessness.

(i) The Welsh Government’s Supporting People Programme August 2017 Wales Audit Office

The review was mindful of a substantial body of leading, worldwide, recent research suggesting we need to take an alternative approach to homelessness. Approaches like 'Housing First', which advocate permanent housing options for homeless people with support delivered to it, rather than the short term 'hostel' approach, is increasingly evidencing more effective outcomes, in tackling long-term homelessness. The diagram below, which was originally developed in Canada (ii), offers a simple summary of how services could potentially move forward.



(ii) Homeless Hub Canada (<http://homelesshub.ca>)

The diagram suggests that, traditionally, commissioners have focussed resources on providing the ‘emergency response’ which support households when they are experiencing a housing crisis: the suggestion being that if we re-focus resources and target them more around prevention and long-term support, for those who need it, we could be able to avoid spending on, and time delivering, the emergency response.

Housing First approaches, with an emphasis on prevention and long-term support, have been developed across North America and Europe and have now gained the support of both UK and Welsh Governments. With so much international evidence suggesting a different approach may be more effective, the review reflected upon what could be learned in relation to services in NPT and how they could potentially shift from the more traditional approach.

Part 1 of this document focusses on how housing services are currently meeting homelessness duties. Part 2 of the document then takes a broader view to consider the local policy context and how other stakeholders are involved in preventing and managing homelessness. Part 3 of the document then draws these two elements together to consider options which could be explored within the Homelessness Strategy.

1.4 The Duties introduced by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 brought into force new duties on Councils. Previously the legal duties of Councils focussed on those households who became homeless and then only if they passed a number of ‘tests’ to determine if they were legally entitled to assistance.

The new Act has changed this. The legal expectations on Councils have been broadened quite significantly. Since the Act, Councils now have a duty to assist all households who face homelessness, regardless of whether they ‘fit’ into the priority need categories. The following sections of the Act break down the responsibilities Councils now have; ie:

- Section 60 - a duty to provide accessible and free advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness. This service should be available to everyone who approaches the authority, regardless of any local connection;
- Section 62 - a duty to assess all households who approach the authority with a housing issue to determine if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- Section 66 - Once the household has been assessed and found to be at threat of homelessness, a duty to assist that household to try and prevent homelessness by taking all 'reasonable steps';
- Section 68 - a duty to provide temporary accommodation to households whom the Council has reason to believe are homeless and may be in priority need;
- Section 73 - Once the household has been assessed and found to be homeless, a duty to assist the household in relieving their homelessness; and
- Section 75 - Once the duty under section 73 has ended, if the household is homeless, has a local connection and fits into one of the priority need groups; (i.e. has children, is 16-17 years old, has mental ill health or learning disabilities, is fleeing domestic abuse, is an 18-21 year old care leaver, has recently left the armed forces), the authority has a duty to secure accommodation for the household.

In Part 2, this report explores all these stages / duties of the act and considers, through the feedback it has received, how the Council is currently delivering at each separate stage.

Part 2 - How is Neath Port Talbot Responding to the homelessness duties in Housing (Wales) Act 2014?

The following section reports on how the Council is currently delivering on the housing duties. It considers evidence collected through the national statistics, through meetings with staff delivering the duties, and from wider meetings/discussions with other agencies.

2.1 Section 60 - The duty to provide free and accessible housing advice and information

In considering the effectiveness of meeting this duty, the review first explored information on the Council's website.

The website displays the contact telephone number prominently at the top of the site; there is a link to Shelter's Cymru App; and the site allows the individual to click on to other services around housing.

The Council also provides advice and information in other ways. It utilises its voluntary partners by providing information on the housing service and the legislation in their offices for households to access.

There is also a service provided by Shelter Cymru, which provides advice and support to all households. At the time of the review the caseworker in NPT had recently left and was due to be replaced. Housing Options staff were very positive about the relationship they'd developed with the previous caseworker and the partnership approach they had established.

2.2 The First Contact

When a person wants to contact the Council for housing advice they can telephone, e-mail a generic inbox, or present to a Council office.

A duty system is in place and the case is picked up by the officer who is on duty. Wherever possible, it is then this officer who manages the case until a resolution is found/duties have been discharged.

It is at this stage that housing advice is provided to all those who present, even when this is all that is necessary. An advice pack has been developed and this is given to those who need it, as well as being available in agencies within local communities.

In relation to moving forward and effectively meeting Section 60 duties, discussions indicate that:

- The authority recognises the need to re-design the website and make it more ‘user-friendly’; and
- it can see the benefits of exploring an IT system which would allow households to outline their housing needs and apply for assistance online.

2.3 Section 62 - The duty to undertake an assessment

The Council has a duty to assess every household who could be at threat of or experiencing homelessness, regardless of any criteria such as whether they are likely to be in priority need or whether they have a local connection.

The authority undertook 1,772 assessments over 2017-18. Of these households assessed, 1,397 were found to either be homeless or at threat of homelessness within 56 days, with the remaining 375 neither at threat of homelessness nor homeless.

To undertake these assessments, the authority employs a team of ‘Housing Options’ staff. These staff not only undertake the assessment, but then support each household to either prevent or resolve their housing issue. They also employ staff to manage and support temporary accommodation, so they can fulfil their duties around providing interim accommodation.

To directly fulfil all these duties, the authority currently employs the following staff:

- 1 full-time equivalent (FTE) Housing Options Manager;
- 11 FTE Housing Options Officers (undertaking assessments and supporting households to meet the housing need identified / prevent homelessness);
- 13 FTE officers working in a variety of roles around the management of temporary accommodation and supporting households staying there;
- 1 FTE officer to access support and manage the 'support gateway'; and
- 3 FTE officers to operate the social lettings agency to source private rented sector options and support landlords with the tenancies secured.

As well as this staff team (employed directly), the authority works in close partnership with voluntary agencies who have specialist knowledge to support the team in preventing and managing homelessness. Four agencies, funded by the WG Homelessness Prevention Grant, are co-located with the Housing Options Team and although they don't directly deliver on the legislation requirements they support the team to do so through the provision of:

- Mediation services between young people and their parents / carers to allow them to stay at home;
- specialist support and advice for those struggling with mental ill health;
- bond finance and support for young people to help them secure affordable private rented accommodation; and
- assertive outreach for those with complex needs/rough sleeping and providing links with the housing options team.

The service is responding effectively to expectations to assess households and then deliver on the duties. A more detailed analysis of the response to each significant duty follows:

2.4 Section 66 - The duty to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness

Following on from the assessment, a decision is made depending on the household's situation. If they are found to be at threat of homelessness within 56 days, then the local authority has a duty to assist the household to try and prevent this.

The following table indicates the numbers of households who have been found at threat of homelessness, since the new act was introduced, and the number where actions were taken to successfully prevent it:

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Number of households found at threat of homelessness	384	360	351
Number of these successfully prevented	201	195	195
% of households prevented at this stage	52%	55%	56%
Average % across Wales prevented at this stage	65%	62%	TBC

If the 8.5% rate of biennial decrease between 2015-16 and 2017-18 were to continue throughout the life of the strategy, then the number of households found at threat of homelessness in 2021-22 would be 294 (i.e. a cumulative 23% reduction since 2015-16). However the combination of potentially further negative developments, such as the ongoing roll-out of universal credit and conversely, the successful implementation of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan, will undoubtedly impact on this progression.

The introduction of this duty reflects the importance WG is now placing on the prevention of homelessness. As discussed, the expectation is that all households are assisted at this stage, regardless of any 'priority need'.

In relation to the percentage of households prevented from becoming homeless at this stage the authority falls below the national average, but not significantly.

The WG expects the local authority to be able to evidence the 'reasonable steps' it has taken to prevent homelessness with these households.

The following table details the % nationally and the % locally of the key step taken in prevention cases over 2016-17:

Key step taken to prevent homelessness and allow household to remain in own home during 2016-17	% of NPT prevention cases	% of national prevention cases
Mediation / conciliation	0%	17%
Financial payments	13%	11%
Debt and Financial Advice	8%	7%
Resolving rent or service charge arrears	5%	18%
Resolving Housing / Welfare Benefit issues	5%	9%
Measures to prevent domestic abuse	3%	4%
Negotiation in the private rented sector	4%	18%
Mortgage advice, etc.	0%	2%
Providing other assistance or specialist support	62%	14%

The other figures in relation to Section 66 collected, which are useful to consider are the reasons a household has been found at threat of homelessness. The following table highlights the reasons in NPT and compares with the national average:

Reason for household being found at threat of homelessness (s66)	% of NPT cases 2016-17	% of national cases 2016-17
Parents no longer willing to accommodate	10%	14%
Other relatives no longer willing to accommodate	8%	9%
Breakdown in relationship (violent)	18% (8%)	12% (5%)
Other violence / harassment	2%	1%
Mortgage arrears	0%	1%
Rent arrears	10%	10%
Loss of rented accommodation	7%	36%
Prison leaver	0%	2%
Leaving care / institution	2%	3%
Property unaffordable	8%	4%
Property unsuitable	8%	4%
Other (including homeless in an emergency, returned from abroad, sleeping rough or in a hostel)	27%	4%
	100%	100%

As the table indicates, the reasons leading to a threat of homelessness in NPT are broadly similar in proportion to those nationally. However, there are areas which need to be highlighted.

From the figures, it appears that people becoming at threat of homelessness due to the threat of loss of rented accommodation is proportionally far lower in NPT than the national average.

The other figure to highlight is the relatively high proportion of households who are being found at threat of homelessness through 'other' reasons.

In relation to this stage of the legislation, discussion centred on the importance of two steps; the homelessness prevention fund and the use of support (i.e. if a support service can be offered the landlord may withdraw s21 notice if they are confident any tenancy issues will be dealt with).

However, there were challenges encountered at this stage. The reality of being at threat of homelessness within 56 days can often be less definitive. For example, a landlord can issue notice, which means that the household is at threat of homelessness within 56 days. However, this doesn't necessarily mean the household will always lose the accommodation within that time (e.g. the landlord may delay taking, or indeed never take, legal action to enforce the notice). This can lead to cases remaining open for long periods of time.

2.5 Section 68 - The duty for provide interim accommodation

If prevention of homelessness work fails and the household becomes homeless, the Council has a duty to provide interim accommodation if it has 'reason to believe' the household will fit with the priority need criteria.

The current provision has not proved adequate in terms of housing all those who have been found eligible for the duty.

The use of temporary accommodation (especially B&B in a neighbouring Council area) wasn't always seen to be effective and in setting up alternatives the Council is aware of the need to reflect on what its purpose will be and how it will work to avoid repeat presentations.

Considering this, additional hostel provision will soon open and the authority is also having discussions with local churches and voluntary organisations, with a view to establishing night shelter provision over the winter months.

In summary, the key challenges for tenants housed on a temporary basis cited by the team were as follows;

- Welfare reform and especially universal credit;
- the difficulty of moving households on, especially those with ever more complex issues; and
- the fact that households are often expected to move quickly once an offer of accommodation is made.

2.6 Section 73 - The duty to take reasonable steps to alleviate homelessness

This duty is triggered when it is no longer possible to prevent homelessness. Once more, all households are eligible for this assistance. The expectation is that all reasonable steps are taken to help secure suitable accommodation likely to remain available for six months, regardless of the household’s priority need or local connection.

The following table illustrates the number of households found through the assessment process to be homeless over the previous three financial years and the proportion who had their homelessness successfully alleviated:

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Number of households found homeless	537	426	652
Number of these successfully alleviated	246	180	275
% of households alleviated at this stage	46%	52%	42%
Average % across Wales alleviated at this stage	45%	41%	41%

The number of households found to be owed this duty reduced by 21% in NPT over the first two years of the legislation, but then increased again substantially over 2017-18. In relation to the percentage of households alleviated at this stage, NPT has remained above the national average and was quite significantly so in 2016-17.

If this rate of biennial increase were to continue throughout the life of the strategy, then the number of households found at threat of homelessness in 2021-22 would be 955 (i.e. a cumulative 78% increase since 2015-16). However the combination of further potentially negative developments, such as ongoing roll-out of universal credit and conversely, the successful implementation of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan, will undoubtedly impact on this progression.

It is also interesting to reflect upon the number of households found to have a duty at this stage, compared to the prevention stage, in 2016-17.

	NPT	Wales
Number of household found to have s66 'prevention' duty	360	9210
Number of households found to have a s73 'alleviation' duty	426	10844
% of households of s66	46%	46%
% of households of s73	54%	54%

The table indicates that the proportion of each duty accepted is in line with the Welsh average.

Councils are also asked to collect which housing option was secured to alleviate homelessness at this stage. The following table details the % nationally and the % locally of the type of accommodation found to alleviate homelessness cases over 2016-17:

Type of accommodation found to alleviate homelessness during 2016-17 and the	% of NPT	% of national

Non-self-contained supported accommodation	3%	12%
Private rented sector (PRS) accommodations with landlord incentive	8%	16%
PRS without landlord incentive	27%	16%
Accommodated with friends / returning home	5%	9%
Self-contained supported housing	7%	10%
Social housing (Council)	2%	17%
Social housing (Housing Association)	47%	17%
Low cost home ownership scheme, low cost market housing solution	0%	0%
Other assistance or support	1%	3%

The table suggests the authority is continuing to utilise social housing in a large proportion of cases. As it doesn't retain its own stock it is understandable that local authority housing is very rarely used.

It is worth exploring the use of supported housing at this stage. It appears its use is less than that nationally, but this may well simply reflect the lack of available provision.

The reasons a household has been found homeless at the s73 are also recorded. The following table highlights the reasons in NPT and compares with the national average:

Reason for household being found at threat of homelessness (s66)	% of NPT cases 2016-17	% of national cases 2016-17
Parents no longer willing to accommodate	14%	15%
Other relatives no longer willing to accommodate	14%	13%
Breakdown in relationship (violent)	31% (14%)	21% (11%)
Other violence / harassment	2%	2%
Mortgage arrears	0%	1%
Rent arrears	4%	3%
Loss of rented accommodation	3%	18%
Prison leaver	11%	12%
Leaving care / institution	1%	3%
Property unaffordable	1%	1%
Property unsuitable	6%	3%
Other (including homeless in an emergency, returned from abroad, sleeping rough or in a hostel)	12%	7%
	100%	100%

As the table indicates, the reasons leading to homelessness in NPT are broadly similar in proportion to those nationally.

2.7 Section 75 - The authority has a duty to house

Once the authority has tried to prevent/alleviate homelessness and this has not been possible, households are assessed to explore if they fit into priority need criteria, (which looks at their possible vulnerability). If they meet these criteria, the authority then has a legal duty to house these households.

The following table indicates the number of households found to have the full housing duty over 2016-17 in NPT and the number of these who were 'positively discharged'. It looks at the % of these and compares it with the national average.

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Number of households owed full housing duty	78	96	69
Number of these households positively discharged	42	63	64
% positively discharged	55%	65%	93%
% nationally positively discharged	80%	81%	78%

As the table indicates, the % of households owed a full duty and who have this duty successfully discharged, has been significantly lower than the national average in the first two years but increased significantly and exceeded the national average last year.

A key point made in feedback from discussions with the Housing Options Service, was the difficulty faced in finding sustainable housing solutions for those households, (usually single), with a variety of complex needs and issues.

These households are often 'revolving' around the housing system. Presenting to the Council, being placed in temporary or permanent accommodation, but for a variety of reasons this accommodation failing and the household starting the process again.

There will be further consideration in relation to these households in various parts of this report. The authority needs to reflect on why certain households find it so hard to retain housing and how it can work in partnership with other agencies to help this group succeed in future.

Part 3 - The Local Policy Context

This part of the review goes beyond what the authority is legally obliged to do under its homelessness duties and starts to explore how it is deploying services to prevent homelessness in a far broader sense.

To consider this it is important to reflect on the strategic direction of the authority and its overarching aims in relation to developing and improving its services.

The overarching Corporate Plan has been developed this year and sets out a vision for the next 4 years (2018-2022). The plan's purpose in Shaping NPT is to ensure that everyone has "a better life, in a better place, for a better future", and to achieve this it sets out 3 key well-being objectives. These are:

- To improve the well-being of children and young people;
- to improve the well-being of all adults who live in the county borough; and
- to develop the local economy and environment so that the well-being of people can be improved.

In relation to meeting these objectives the homelessness strategy has a role to play in all three, but it is the first two which are most pertinent.

If everyone works together to prevent people becoming homeless, then the well-being of children, young people and adults will all be improved.

Sitting under the Corporate Plan are other strategic documents which include (and are particularly relevant in this context), the Housing Strategy and the Social Services 'Strategic Business Plan for Adult and Children's Services'; as well as documents

such as the 'Local Supporting People Plan', 'The Plan for Adult Social Care' and 'The Plan for Children and Young People Services'.

There are also broader regional documents, including the 'Western Bay Area Plan' (predominantly focusing on improving social care and well-being), as well as the 'Western Bay Supporting People Regional Plan'.

The key focus of all these plans is prevention; whether that be preventing people needing costly health services, costly social care services, costly criminal justice services, or costly substance misuse services, etc. Any homelessness strategy needs the same preventative focus.

In relation to the Housing Strategy, its vision is that "housing in NPT will be appropriate, affordable and of good quality, in sustainable communities, offering people choice and support if they need it". This review looks at to the extent this has been achieved. Homelessness is often an indicator of this failing in some way and it needs to consider how this can be avoided to help meet the vision outlined.

In the Strategic Business Plan for Adult and Children's Services there is a desire to develop an 'asset based' approach which explores how communities themselves can take the lead in developing their strengths and resilience. It advocates a 'one front door' approach to access services and highlights the need for robust information, advice and assistance services.

This review looked to identify the extent to which Housing and related services are involved in this vision and the opportunities to become more involved. Each strategy strives to ensure people's issues are identified early and then supported at the right time and acknowledges that it is essential services are placed right in the heart of communities and develop a detailed knowledge of how communities operate and the people within them.

To explore the extent to which the prevention of homelessness and housing services are/can play a full role in this agenda, the review explored a variety of different service areas through interviews with key stakeholders and by exploring current

service provision and demands. The following sections explore the findings of this research and discussion, by detailing how different service areas are responding.

Linking Homeless Prevention with Supporting People Programme Grant (SPPG) funded Services

SPPG is a specific grant, allocated by the Welsh Government to all councils in Wales, to provide housing related support. This support is delivered to households to support them maintain their tenancy and ease pressures on more intensive services, such as health and social services. It is delivered by a wide variety of agencies commissioned by Councils, utilising the ring-fenced grant it receives.

The funding can support people with a variety of needs including people struggling with mental ill health, young people, those experiencing domestic abuse, those with substance misuse issues, ex-offenders and those who have become or are threatened with homeless, older people, and people with a learning disability.

As these services have developed since the introduction of the fund in 2003, they have played a significant part in the prevention of homelessness agenda and local authorities have been encouraged by the Welsh Government to commission services to support them meet the duties introduced by Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Those working in Supporting People in NPT are based in the Social Services Health & Housing Directorate's Common Commissioning Unit and are responsible for the development and commissioning of services to meet the objectives outlined above.

In Neath Port Talbot there is an annual Supporting People budget of around £4.7m. This effectively pays the revenue costs of staff providing support to individuals and families to maintain their housing. Approximately 71% of the grant funds 'floating support', i.e. support which floats around the community into people's homes, and 29% funds 'fixed site' projects, i.e. accommodation specifically commissioned with support on site.

In relation to how the budget is allocated, just under 50% is used for staff operating the floating support services, with the remainder funding the staff in fixed projects.

The Role of Floating Support Services

In relation to 'floating support' the total budget in 2018-19 equated to £2.1m and £1.7m of this funding is utilised to fund three services:

- The Prevention and Well-Being Support (PAWS) Service;
- Community Independence Service (CIS); and
- Homelessness Prevention & Relief Support Service.

There are also a number of smaller floating support services working as 'specialists' to support households experiencing domestic abuse.

Each of these 3 major services have similar objectives. They work in communities, supporting households to prevent them becoming homeless/help them maintain their independence. Each service works with all age groups and people who could potentially be experiencing a variety of issues over and above any housing issue.

The Council has agreed the need to explore how each is currently operating and their current contribution to the prevention of homelessness; in the context of developing resilient communities, by helping people to help themselves.

The PAWS Service

The Supporting People Team have conducted an extensive amount of work in determining how to deliver services in the most effective manner. This work has focussed on ensuring they are delivered at the right time and in the right place, i.e. are delivered early before crisis wherever possible and are accessible to the communities of NPT.

From the evidence gathered during this work the team concluded, that services should be established to work area by area in Neath Port Talbot, rather than having 'specialist' services delivering support to specific client groups. This does not mean that no specialist support is delivered, just that it is part of a broader service. The Supporting People Lead described it as "not generic, but multi-specialist".

Last year the team brought together a variety of existing floating support services, and by utilising existing funding, tendered for a replacement service to work across the county borough, but with an emphasis on locality-based support.

The aim of this exercise was to re-model support so that in each area there is one support service for those at threat of homelessness. The theory behind such an approach is that, as the service is based in a specific area, the support workers can develop 'local intelligence' of their patch and form and nourish working relationships with local agencies/community groups, charities, food banks, etc. These relationships then ensure that, when a potential housing issue is spotted by those organisations, they can call on the support of the worker in that area (who they know well) to prevent homelessness.

By focussing the teams within a locality, the Supporting People Team can deliver a more cost-effective service with less travel time.

The support is delivered in 4 areas of the County and is expected to support approximately 340 households at any one time, who can live in any type of housing tenure.

How is the service accessed?

To access the service currently a referral needs to be made to the 'Gateway' officer who sits in Housing Options.

Referrals into PAWS

As discussed, the service is relatively new, but we do have referrals information for the first year of its operation:

- Over 2017-18 the service received 628 referrals;
- 72% of these referrals came from housing organisations;
- 323 of referrals (51%) came from Housing Associations; and
- 92 referrals came from Housing Options, equating to 15%.

The Community Independence Service (CIS)

This service is a floating support service which employs the equivalent of 16.5 full time support staff. The service covers the entire County Borough but is not delivered on a locality basis. The service supports approximately 142 households at any one time.

Since its inception the service has worked closely with Social Services and has predominantly worked with households / individuals who have an assessed 'care need'.

However, with the introduction of the Social Care and Well Being Act, the emphasis on prevention has led to the service moving away from this criteria and is now supporting any household referred, so that the pressure on more traditional care services can be reduced.

How is the service accessed?

Previously the service utilised the Adult Social Care Gateway for referrals, but it has now adopted 'Open Door' principles. This means that referrals are encouraged from a broad variety of agencies and groups and are sent directly to the service, which assesses need and provides support accordingly.

If higher needs are recognised they are referred into the adult services gateway for a statutory service, but the aim of the support is to get to people early and avoid this, if possible.

Under the new 'Open Door' principles the service does not operate a waiting list and responds to households 'on demand'; trying to meet their housing support needs and maintaining their independence within the community. The service is delivered in partnership with a variety of partners, including the 'Community Connectors' and 'Local Area Co-ordinators' (the role of these services will be discussed later in the report).

Referrals into CIS

With the new 'Open Door' approach the referral process for the service is changing and becoming much simpler for all involved.

Over 2017-18 the service received referrals from the following agencies:

Agency	Number of referrals (2017-18)
Afan Network Social Work Team	11
Neath Network Social Work Team	33
Community Mental Health Team North	10
Community Mental Health Team South	12
Community Resource Team	18
Housing Options / Homelessness Team	13
Crisis Resolution Home Treatment Team	2
Outreach Team	1
Total	98

As the table indicates, most of the referrals to the service are coming from social care services, where you would assume the household has already been assessed as having a social care duty.

Over the coming year, with the development of the 'Open Door' access approach, it is hoped that the referrals coming through will originate from a broader variety of agencies, so that support is delivered before the need for a social care intervention arises. This approach reflects objectives around developing a far more preventative approach.

The Homelessness Prevention & Relief Support Service

To meet the support needs of those who have become homeless or at imminent threat of homelessness, Supporting People funds the Housing Options service to deliver support in conjunction with its statutory duties. With the changes introduced in the Housing (Wales) Act, there is an expectation that those staff delivering the authority's housing duties do far more than simply assess a household's legal entitlements.

There is an expectation that staff work with households to problem solve, access accommodation, sign-post to other support/advice services, etc. A fair proportion of any options advisor's work is effectively housing related support.

The service is expected to complete the same data returns to the Supporting People Team as other providers sat outside statutory functions.

How is the service accessed?

As discussed in the first section of the review, the Housing Options service has a duty to assess all households who approach them in housing need, to determine if they are homeless or at threat of homelessness. If so, they then have duties to prevent/manage the situation. Therefore, the support is delivered to all households for whom the authority has a housing duty. There is no waiting list and staff respond to demand as it presents.

Referrals into Housing Options

Many of those households presenting to housing options will simply be self-referrals, i.e. they have a housing need are at threat of homelessness/homeless and will therefore seek support from the Council. However, there are also a significant proportion who will be referred by agencies working in the community.

Housing Options do not have historical information in relation to which agencies refer into their service but have recently adopted systems to allow them to collect this information.

Supporting those with more complex needs

As discussed in Section 1, the support needs of an increasing number of households presenting are complex and creating demands on a variety of services.

Summary of Floating Support

The floating support services delivered in the County Borough to prevent homelessness and improve well-being are by no means insignificant. The 3 key services receive approximately £1.7m per annum.

If they are to meet broader strategy objectives around prevention, then the authority needs to reflect on how they can optimally be accessed at the 'right time and the right place' to try and avoid more costly options.

The service delivered by Housing Options must be considered slightly differently as it is assisting the Council in meeting its duties. However, the other two key services should be playing a significant role in 'turning off' the demand for these duties and how they deliver this together with other partners working in communities needs to be considered.

Fixed-site

As well as floating support the Council funds support delivered in fixed site supported housing projects, where staff are allocated to properties to support the tenants living there.

Those services with relevance to homelessness include its temporary accommodation for those households who the Council has a duty to house, services for young people, and refuges for those fleeing domestic abuse.

As discussed in Section 1 the Council is currently re-opening more temporary accommodation and so this is the ideal time to reflect on the purpose of this and how it will prevent homelessness.

In relation to the young people's services the authority has recently undertaken a comprehensive re-procurement exercise to ensure the supported accommodation available is fit for purpose. Any developments are in their early stages and the review has not explored this in any depth, due to the amount of work so recently undertaken.

The authority has also recently undertaken a comprehensive review of domestic abuse service. To avoid duplication, it was agreed that these services would remain outside the remit of this review.

The review has focussed time on reflecting upon the needs of those people with complex needs who are creating high levels of demand, on not just housing services, but a wide variety of others; including substance misuse, health and the police.

Threats and Opportunities Moving Forward

There remains some uncertainty in relation to the future of SPPG. The WG is consulting on whether the grant could be merged with other funds (Families First, Communities First, Homelessness Prevention Grant, Flying Start, etc.) to become the "Early Intervention Prevention and Support Grant".

This would give NPT greater flexibility in relation to how to spend the grant. However, it remains unclear at this stage how this will operate in practice.

Any strategy developed will need to bear these changes in mind and consider the opportunities in terms of how this proposed merged grant could impact upon the prevention of homelessness services currently being delivered.

However, despite how the funding stream is managed and commissioned in the future, there remain opportunities to focus it at preventing pressure on more costly options. In line with national and local objectives, how any funding is utilised most effectively to prevent homeless needs to drive any homelessness strategy. SPPG funded services need to be commissioned to help meet these objectives.

The Broader Community Support Agenda - Local Area Coordination and Community Connectors

As part of the broader agenda to deliver community-based services to prevent pressures on more costly options and support people to retain their independence, the Council has developed a programme of ‘Local Area Co-ordination’, as well as employing several Community Connectors. This part of the review explores these developments and considers how they could form part / contribute to managing and preventing homelessness.

Local Area Coordination

Local Area Co-ordination originated in Australia and aims to deliver “a long-term, integrated, evidence-based approach to supporting people as valued citizens in their communities”.

The Local Area Co-ordination Network states;

“Rather than waiting for people to fall into crisis, assessing deficits, testing eligibility and fitting people into more expensive (and increasingly unaffordable) services, it works alongside people to:

- Build and pursue their personal vision for a good life;
- stay strong, safe and connected as contributing citizens;
- find practical, non-service solutions to problems wherever possible; and
- Build more welcoming, inclusive and supportive communities.

There are currently 5 'Local Area Coordinators' (LACs) working in 3 separate areas. In effect, none of these staff have a caseload; they work with the entire population on their patch, (approximately 7,000 people); but focus their time on those who are struggling with life, isolated or excluded.

There are no eligibility criteria to access the service. The staff respond to demand as it presents, but also proactively seek out people to help through networking and developing relationships in the communities in which they work. Staff have been in post for 3 years and all initial evaluation evidences a significant impact in relation to delivering positive outcomes, in meeting the aims outlined above.

In discussions with the lead officer, they identified a great deal of work undertaken by the LACs in relation to tenancy issues, households who are threatened with homelessness, and people who are homeless.

There is undoubtedly potential for the service to play a large part in the prevention of homelessness and links have been made between services during the review.

Threats and Opportunities Moving Forward

Threats were identified in relation to the expectations on the LAC service. The development of the approach takes time and there were fears that the desire for quick results may count against it.

There were also concerns about the financial pressures being encountered because by its very nature the service works with everyone, regardless of assessment/eligibility criteria.

In relation to opportunities, the service identified what a valuable partnership could be developed with housing agencies, especially SPPG funded floating support services, so that these services and the LAC approach could work together to prevent homelessness.

The Community Connectors Service

According to the Council website “The Community Connectors Service supports adults with disabilities to find and attend suitable activities and groups in the local community. The main aim of the pan-disability service is to:

- Encourage people to build new friendships;
- involve people in community groups and activities;
- promote independence and well-being; and
- gain new skills.

Bringing Community Support Services Together?

If you include the two community-based SPPG funded services, there are four distinct services supporting people in communities to retain their independence and prevent them becoming homeless:

- PAWS;
- CIS;
- LACs; and
- Community Connectors.

All four services have very similar aims, but due to the way they have been commissioned, they might be working with slightly different people but equally, could be working with same people, at the same time.

Any strategy moving forward needs to reflect upon how these different services can work in closer partnership to prevent homelessness in NPT, retain people in their communities, reduce the pressures on more costly care and health options, and allow communities to develop the strengths and assets to move towards having the capacity to support themselves. If these services can succeed in working in closer partnership to fulfil these aims, they will be at the very heart of the broader strategic direction indicated in the high-level documents driving services forward in the area.

The Role of Homelessness Prevention Grant

Homelessness Prevention Grant is paid directly by the WG to organisations across Wales. In NPT there are four organisations receiving nearly £200k of this grant to deliver services. The services funded by this grant are:

- Mediation service between young people and their families to prevent homelessness;
- support for people with mental ill health to prevent homelessness;
- bond finance and support to allow young people to access the private rented sector; and
- housing advice to households homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The review set up a meeting with these organisations to discuss their current services, how they contribute to the prevention of homelessness agenda, and how they saw their services developing in the future.

As discussed, each of these services are embedded within the Housing Options service and work in close partnership with the Council to support them in meeting their homelessness duties. Each service is particularly relevant in helping the Council meet its duties around Section 66 in trying to prevent homelessness when it is threatened and play a significant part in ensuring the authority takes all 'reasonable steps' to prevent homelessness.

In discussions with those delivering these services, agencies felt that demands had been increasing and the options available for the people they are working with are becoming more difficult to access. They felt welfare reform had played a part in these difficulties.

In relation to where most demand occurred they felt the highest levels were in the urban areas of Neath and Port Talbot, but the northern valley areas did have their own issues around affordability and availability of rented accommodation, and people were often drawn to more rural areas for this reason.

The organisations felt the housing options service had changed since the introduction of the Housing Act and in general a more proactive prevention approach was being delivered. They felt relationships between their staff/services and housing

options had improved since they have been co-located and were able to deliver a far more seamless service to people in need.

Threats and opportunities moving forward

Agencies were concerned about the proposed bringing together of grants and feared services like theirs might be at threat when there is so much statutory need which might be seen as a greater priority.

However, they also saw opportunities in relation to working more closely with services currently delivered through other funding streams, especially if SPPG and Homelessness Prevention Grant funding were brought together as one fund.

Another significant threat cited to preventing and managing homelessness was once again the introduction of Universal Credit.

Moving forward, it appears that these services are playing a crucial role in supporting the Council to meet its homelessness duties. Without them the pressure would be even greater on the housing options team. In effect these services are playing a role in the 'emergency response', rather than prevention. The demand for these services is likely to remain, but it can potentially be reduced if other prevention services are modelled correctly.

Working with Housing Associations to prevent and manage homelessness

There are approximately 11,500 social housing dwellings (19% of all dwellings) in the County Borough. 3 key housing associations (HAs) provide the vast majority of this accommodation.

Under the Housing (Wales) Act these HAs have a duty to assist the Council in meeting its homelessness duties and each explained how their allocations are all made with reference to nominations coming from the Council with homelessness status. However, each also have their own list and stress that many households they allocate from this list may well be legally 'homeless' but don't necessarily come to them through the nomination route.

They feel the approach in the county has changed since the introduction of the Housing Act, but some of these changes have also been prompted by significant welfare reform; including the introduction of Universal Credit and the 'bedroom tax'.

Each of the HAs have financial inclusion teams working with their tenants to help them keep on an even keel and prevent them becoming homeless. They stressed that any eviction proceedings are always very much the last resort.

The associations discussed the important role they play in communities and the knowledge and intelligence each housing officer develops in relation to their local patch.

Accessing support to prevent homelessness and improve well-being for households in HA stock

As discussed in the 'floating support' section, HAs account for more than 50% of the referrals made to PAWS over 2017-18. Before the re-procurement exercise, they all had their own services, but these were subsumed within the broader locality service developed.

Threats and Opportunities Moving Forward

The associations did express concerns in relation to the 'super grant' being proposed by WG. Once again, they feared this could mean resources shifting to the most acute response and preventative services losing out.

However, they could also see the opportunity that closer links with services like PAWS, CIS, Local Area Co-ordination, Team Around the Family, Families First, etc. could well lead to more seamless services for households.

They also saw threats as Universal Credit is rolled out and stressed the importance of being to be able to access the 'right support, at the right time' to ensure their tenants do not fall in to arrears and become at threat of homelessness.

However, they were positive in identifying opportunities for preventing homelessness in the area, but only through closer partnership working at both strategic and operational level.

In summary, there are enormous opportunities to work in closer partnership with HAs to prevent and manage homelessness. These will be discussed in more detail in the suggested priorities section later in the review.

Working with the Private Rented Sector

Along with social housing, the other key sector which the authority is utilising to meet housing needs and prevent homelessness is the private rented sector (PRS).

As highlighted in the Council's Housing Strategy, the sector has grown significantly over recent years. In relation to the proportion of the stock it represents in the County Borough it "has seen over a 4% percentage rise from 6 to 10% in 10 years".

Alongside this, the authority is now able to discharge its housing duties through offering an appropriate and affordable private rented sector property. If the household refuses this offer the authority is within its right to discharge its duty.

The authority has a close working relationship with the sector. Led by the 'Housing Renewals and Adaptations Section', it provides enforcement services, loans for refurbishment, HMO regulation and manages the Council's 'Social lettings Agency'.

The Social Lettings Agency

This agency works with private landlords to assist in the management and letting of properties for those who are homeless, threatened with homelessness, and in housing need.

It currently manages 57 properties which are utilised to meet these needs and works with 24 different private landlords.

Threats and Opportunities Moving Forward

The key threats identified included further welfare reform and the ongoing impact of Universal Credit. There are genuine fears that this will lead to rent arrears in the properties the agency manages. They also identified the problems of providing accommodation for single people, especially as affordability is likely to be such an issue (for under 35s particularly). Finally, there were concerns that the private rented sector may be seen as the best solution in relation to meeting demand and there is not the supply to meet this demand.

In relation to opportunities, they are exploring linking loans and capital funding to private landlords very closely with the social lettings agency.

They also see further opportunities to link the agency with the empty homes agenda and explore how those homes brought back into use can form part of the offer/agency's stock.

They also see scope in looking at the private sector as a possible option in which to develop more temporary accommodation options and learn from other Welsh local authorities to see if 'temp-to-perm' options could be developed; effectively placing a household in temporary accommodation initially, but if the tenancy proves successful changing the tenancy so it's moved to a permanent basis, without the tenant having to move.

The private rented sector is able to play a large role in the prevention and management of homelessness moving forward; with the social lettings agency at the very heart of this role. However, the increasing demand on the sector needs to be considered and it must be remembered that other housing providers still have a role to play.

Working with Children's Services to Prevent Homelessness

As part of the review, the lead officer for the 'Route 16' service was interviewed, as well as the social worker who works embedded in the housing options team; to help meet the housing and support needs of young people, (16-17yr olds and 18-21 year-old former care leavers).

Meeting the housing needs of young people has become increasingly difficult across the UK. Affordability issues, welfare reform and changing demography have all had an impact.

Work has been undertaken to develop a protocol between housing and children's services to help meet young people's housing needs. This is live and active and in relation to those leaving care has helped joint working to deliver effective outcomes. As discussed previously, young people's static supported accommodation has recently been re-procured with aim of ensuring supported housing for young people is available at the right time; both for those leaving care and other young people unable to remain in the family home.

The housing options service includes a mediation service, which works to mediate between young people and their parents and carers to allow young people to remain at home. The outcomes recorded for this service are very impressive.

In discussions with the Route 16 service, they feel that services being delivered to 16/17yr olds are effective and meeting aims, and for care leavers up until 21yrs.

Again, services highlighted the complex needs of many young people presenting.

Threats and Opportunities Moving Forward

In relation to opportunities, the newly tendered service in relation to supported housing was highlighted; but there was also discussion in relation to improving transition arrangements for young people when moving from having the support of a young people's advisor and ensuring the support they received as they moved into adulthood was as seamless as possible.

There is an opportunity to ensure that partners are working more closely during this transition to prevent homeless and ensure young people get off to the best start as they move into adulthood.

Working with the Substance Misuse and Community Safety Agenda

Following the evidence from other partners in relation to the challenges being faced with households with the most complex needs; when consulting with these services the review focused on their thoughts on how housing needs could be met for this group and the role their services and the broader housing and support service could play.

The Community Safety Team have led on establishing a Street Vulnerable Multi Agency Risk Assessment Committee (SVMARAC). This is based on a similar process already embedded for domestic abuse cases, but instead focuses on people who are either street homeless or very vulnerably housed.

The Committee is chaired by South Wales Police and brings together all the agencies who are trying to work with and support these individuals/couples. This includes substance misuse treatment service providers, probation, SPPG & Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) funded services, Housing Options, the Department of Work and Pensions and 'soup kitchen' volunteers representing charities.

The consultant undertaking the review was able to observe one of these meetings and was impressed at both the level of attendance and the genuine enthusiasm to work together to try and meet the needs of the people discussed. 11 of the 12 people/couples discussed were either rough sleeping, sofa surfing, or very vulnerably housed and expected to lose their current accommodation soon.

The agencies around the table all knew the individuals discussed very well, and in some cases had been working with and supporting them for many years.

Community Safety

In discussions with the Community Safety Team, they explained how the incidents of street begging had been making the news locally and working with this group was seen as a top priority. An outreach worker employed by one WG HPG funded service provider had recently been funded using additional WG HPG and this service had delivered some positive outcomes.

Community Safety felt a 'Housing First' approach to help house these individuals was worth exploring, as did the other members of the SVMARAC when the possibility was discussed there.

Substance Misuse Services

A meeting was held with staff from the regional substance misuse team. They work across Western Bay and support and facilitate the spending of the Substance Misuse Action Fund (SMAF), which equates to £3.6m across the region and delivers funding to a variety of agencies and services working with those with substance misuse issues. NPT has proportionally a high rate of drug related deaths, compared to other areas of the UK, and to reduce this is one of the team's priorities.

They highlighted that there is currently no supported accommodation in the NPT area specifically supporting people with substance misuse issues, although they recognise that many SP funded services are supporting households experiencing substance misuse.

They expressed interest in developing a 'Housing First' approach but warned it would not be a panacea. They highlighted the number of people who struggle with mental health issues as well as struggling with substance misuse and stated that health involvement in any 'Housing First' type development was essential. They also thought it important that developing intelligence to understand the links between homelessness and substance misuse was an important area to focus.

Once again, Universal Credit was a key risk in relation to those experiencing substance misuse issues and the likely consequences in terms of rent arrears and potential homelessness.

Linking with Health and Mental Health Services to Prevent Homelessness

The reviewer met with both the Assistant Director for Strategy and Partnerships at the Health Board and the lead for mental health working in Social Services, as well as observing a meeting of the Western Bay Health and Housing Group.

Discussions with the Health Board focussed on the two key issues which are ever-present in this report:

- How we engage, support and successfully house those with the most complex needs, who are creating the highest demand on services; and
- how we work with community-based health services to prevent homelessness.

Complex Needs

In relation to meeting the housing needs of those with the most complex needs, the Health Board wants to ensure that any approach is explored regionally and not just in isolation within the county borough.

They cite the pressures on accident and emergency (A&E) wards which are based in Swansea. Swansea currently have nurses who specifically work with the homeless population in the city, but as they are supporting this population, they are not in a position to support those accessing A&E from outside the city.

They do not believe they should simply replicate the Swansea provision NPT, but think creatively about how it can deliver services for this group, in light of the different environment offered by NPT. As services do not currently exist, they see this as a real opportunity.

Prevention

In relation to Health services playing more of a role in prevention of homelessness in the community, again the Health Board was positive in principle. There are currently no practices in NPT who offer the 'enhanced' homeless service.

The Health Board also highlighted the difficulties in sharing information and the difficulties presented in understanding the services that exist. They cited three different sources of information. They feel there needs to be far greater collaboration to understand how all these are working, so that they complement each other; rather than stand in isolation.

Preventing and Managing Homelessness for those with Mental Health Needs

To consider these needs the reviewing officer met the service lead for mental health based in the Council's Social Services Department.

There appear to be strong relationships with housing services in relation to working in partnership to meet the housing needs of those with mental health issues. There are regular multi-disciplinary meetings where cases are discussed, and the existing social care gateway can alert housing/housing providers and refer accordingly when a housing need is identified.

There is a support service specifically for people with a statutory mental health need and social services were positive in relation to how this was working and the partnership working that has been developed.

The service also discussed the move to deliver satellite services in communities for both those with a registered care need and ensuring prevention services are in place. They recognised the importance of developing partnerships with both the PAWS and CIS services as this agenda is progressed.

In relation to those with most complex needs, the service was keen to establish involvement in the SVMARAC and ensure mental services are represented in future. This development was welcomed by the Community Safety Team who facilitate the meetings.

Threats and Opportunities Moving Forward

As discussed, there are many opportunities to link with the broader community-based model to ensure those struggling with mental ill health are supported to retain their housing in the community. The shift towards satellite mental health services throughout the County Borough can only help a strong partnership developing with existing SPPG funded services.

The service also recognised the threat of drug and alcohol abuse and its impact on mental ill health. In relation to the homelessness agenda, they stressed the importance of housing related support services having the appropriate training to keep up with an ever changing, and challenging, issue.

Part 3 - Suggested Priorities for the Homelessness Strategy

In order to move the focus and targeting of resource, in terms of how homelessness is tackled, away from the 'emergency response' and towards prevention services at the heart of the community, and accommodation and support services which try and tackle the 'revolving door', then the priorities need to focus on how changes can be made/new services can be developed to achieve this.

It can be argued that all the duties placed on the Council constitute an emergency response. The evidence suggests that, if these duties are triggered, the Council is not really preventing homelessness, simply trying to resolve a housing issue which is in crisis or approaching it.

Services need to be developed which 'turn off' the demand on Housing Options services. Not only will this prevent homelessness, but also ease the pressure on these staff and allow them more time to effectively manage crisis, when it arises.

This section begins by exploring how we can we develop support and accommodation services to improve the focus and direct resources to reduce crisis/homelessness; to which end the following suggested priority outcomes could be used to frame the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan, when it developed:

- Shifting focus and resources to new accommodation and support approaches to prevent homelessness;
- shifting focus and resources to community-based prevention approaches to prevent homelessness; and
- developing more effective systems and monitoring moving forward.

There follows a set of eight suggested priority areas for action to achieve these outcomes:

- **Priority One: Early intervention and Prevention** - Strengthening approaches to early intervention and prevention
- **Priority Two: Implementing a Multi-Agency Approach** - Targeted support for those with the most complex needs to prevent repeat episodes of homelessness
- **Priority Three: Review of temporary accommodation service models** - Help people to access secure permanent accommodation
- **Priority Four: Development of specific housing plans** - Focusing on helping people most at risk of experiencing homelessness
- **Priority Five: Pooled Budgets** - Making best use of our financial resources
- **Priority Six: Partnership Working** - Further strengthening links with partner agencies to better understand needs and demands
- **Priority Seven: Information Technology** - Enhancing the use of information technology
- **Priority Eight: Monitoring SPPG services** - Ensuring that our SPPG commissioning helps us to deliver our strategy

Further set out below in a little more detail is how the review would anticipate partners working together in respect of such actions:

Priority 1

To prevent homelessness and the applications/presentations to Housing Options by developing a far more proactive partnership approach between PAWS, CIS, LAC, Community Connectors and housing officers

The key focus of Supporting People floating support services should be to prevent homelessness. To prevent homelessness, services need to reach people at the right time and in the right place. Once households have presented to Housing Options it is often too late to prevent them becoming homeless, so services need to be modelled to get to people earlier.

The current configuration of services is complex. The Council needs to question if there is a need for so many services all working to the same aims, in the same communities.

The local area coordination approach sits outside Supporting People and could act as a lynchpin for people to access the service they need. The review asks the following questions:

- Could 'locality' services be established to mirror the existing and developing LAC areas;
- could the PAWS and CIS services be spilt to develop services in a number of these areas, ie PAWS in several areas and CIS in a number of other areas;
- could resources be weighted to those areas from which most homeless households are presenting, so that they can be supported early to avoid triggering duties;
- could discussions be held with housing associations to ensure their housing officers are playing a full part in any 'virtual area team', as the eyes and ears on their estates; and
- are current access arrangements for PAWS creating more demand for homelessness duties – ie should PAWS abandon the 'Gateway' and establish the same 'Open Door' access arrangements adopted by CIS, to allow support to be delivered as early as possible?

These questions need to be explored by the Council. To ensure housing, and associated services, are playing a full role in the 'Building Safe and Resilient Communities' agenda, it needs to consider how it re-models services to better support wider endeavour. In order to do so, it stands to reason that these services are optimally located in the hearts of these very communities.

Priority 2

To explore, (by utilising the SVMARAC as a vehicle), how a multi-agency approach can be adopted to commission and then oversee a 'Housing First' service for those creating the highest demand on services

As discussed throughout the review, there are increasingly complex people creating high demands on housing options, temporary accommodation and a variety of other services who are 'revolving' around the system without having their needs met.

To try an alternative approach for this group the authority should explore establishing a 'Housing First' service; one which places people in permanent housing with support around them, without them first having to 'graduate' through any temporary/hostel accommodation system.

The Welsh Government is advocating this approach and there is a possibility funding will be made available. Their expectations on what any service should look like is laid out in this document.

<https://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/180206-housing-first-en.pdf>

In relation to how any service is planned, commissioned and managed; the existing Street Vulnerable MARAC is in an ideal vehicle to oversee and drive any service. The cases discussed are exactly right in relation to the households such a service could benefit, and the variety of agencies and expertise involved in the group could prove invaluable in establishing any such service.

To ensure Health involvement and make the relevant links to local A&E departments, (where the most chaotic often have their health needs met), the planning and commissioning of the service could be developed in partnership with Swansea. This does not mean that NPT would not have its own distinct service, but one which works in close partnership with any similar development in Swansea.

In relation to Housing Options and helping ease pressures on this service, the authority should reflect upon a couple of members of existing staff being assigned a role to support the development of the project, develop close relationships with households receiving the service and agencies delivering it. These staff should help households access their legal entitlements, but also understand that issues such as 'priority need' and 'intentionality' would be an irrelevance in relation

to this project. Any staff chosen would need to receive appropriate training in helping and supporting households with complex needs, who will have lived complex lives.

Housing Associations will need to play a part in offering accommodation for the project. Once again, this would sit outside normal structures. Allocations policies, 'choice-based lettings' approaches and 'banding systems' would not apply.

Priority 3

The authority needs to question the purpose of its temporary accommodation and consider whether a 'temp to perm' approach could be developed

With so much evidence from staff that people are leaving temporary accommodation, but then soon becoming homeless again and returning to it, the Council needs to reflect upon what existing provision is achieving and whether a different approach is necessary.

Bed and Breakfast use is relatively high, more temporary accommodation has just opened and the staffing levels managing the accommodation and supporting households are significant.

With so much resource currently being focussed on the 'emergency response' the next few years offer an opportunity to move away from this and explore alternative models.

The use of the private rented sector, the potential for leasing arrangements, partnerships with housing associations, etc. should all be explored. It is also worth considering how 'temp to perm' options could be further developed; i.e. that accommodation is sourced, used as temporary accommodation in the first instance, but is then made permanent to avoid the household having to continually move from option to option and avoid 'silting up' of properties.

Priority 4

A specific housing plan to develop options for single people needs to be considered, (with particular reference to those under 35)

With so many agencies highlighting the lack of accommodation options for single people, especially young people, it is time to directly plan how these options can be developed. The authority should develop a strategy to develop single person accommodation.

The strategy should encompass options in the private rented sector, (utilising available funding), and utilise social housing grant and other WG housing grants in partnership with housing associations. It should also explore how shared housing options could be developed in all tenures, (ensuring they are affordable and sustainable options for young people).

Priority 5

A joint budget to support the accommodation costs of young people could be established based on current spending. This could avoid difficulties in relation to 'who pays'.

In relation to vulnerable young people the reviewing officer found continuing difficulties in the relationship between Housing and Children's Services; especially around the duties each has and who is responsible.

To improve this relationship and ensure the authority is working in the interests of young people, rather than in the interests of each department's budgetary pressures, the review suggests a joint budget is established to help meet the housing needs of young people in crisis.

This budget should be based on current spending levels and be planned, (where possible), in partnership between Housing and Children's Services. Some of this budget will inevitably be used in 'crisis' situations; but by working in close partnership it is possible to utilise an element of it to avoid crisis and develop appropriate systems to prevent homelessness among young people wherever possible.

Priority 6

Greater partnership working with JC+ needs to be explored to help mitigate the impact of Universal Credit and its potential to create more homelessness presentations

As discussed, the introduction of Universal Credit is creating significant challenges. There appear to be opportunities for the Council to further build on joint working and communication with DWP/Job Centre+ staff.

Priority 7

The authority needs to consider adopting an IT approach which will help people and agencies access help earlier and develop a deeper understanding of current demand

The analysis of the current homelessness statistics shows that they are not being completed accurately. For example, the number of submissions in the 'other' box is far higher than the Welsh average.

The problems posed by this are not just that it creates an unrealistic picture of current services being delivered, but also means the authority lacks the required intelligence to help it understand how services can be improved.

The authority should explore how other local authorities have adopted IT systems to help allocate housing, record homelessness and help deliver support services. Ceredigion and Newport are both worth exploring.

Priority 8

The 'strategic relevance' testing deployed by SP needs to change to reflect the objectives adopted in any homelessness strategy

The Supporting People Team is currently collecting a great deal of information to test if the services they commission are strategically relevant. At present, this information is not 'testing' whether it's relevant to any particular strategy.

Therefore, moving forward new measures should be established to understand if the objectives within the homelessness strategy are being realised.

These measures need to focus on whether more people are being supported early, whether pressures are being eased on the emergency response, whether 'Housing First' approaches are leading to less demands on services, whether less homelessness presentations are coming from certain areas of the County Borough and, if so, why. How these measures evolve needs to be explored, but it is important resources are focussed on measuring what matters.