

## **Powys Homelessness Review**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Purpose & Methodology**

Each local authority in Wales has a duty to undertake a review of how it is preventing and managing homelessness. The purpose of this review is to inform the Powys Homelessness Strategy which will frame the direction for services over the coming years.

The review engaged a wide variety of stakeholders, including those who have used services; those delivering housing services and those who deliver services outside housing, but have direct experience of working with people who are homeless / at threat of homelessness.

#### **The National Context**

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 introduced several new duties in relation to homelessness for local authorities. It brought into law the 'prevention of homelessness' focus which had been the key direction of national policy development over recent years.

This approach focussed on providing services which focussed on finding housing solutions for all households in housing need, rather than processing people through the legal 'homelessness' process.

This reflects a broader national policy direction around areas such as health and social services which aim to put prevention at the heart of services to avoid more costly options.

There is also increasing evidence through international research that the 'traditional' approach to managing homelessness is focussing too much on the point of crisis, rather than on prevention and longer-term support. A recent Welsh Audit Office report concluded that "Local authorities continue to focus on managing people in crisis rather than stop it from happening".

#### **Part 1 - The Duties Introduced**

The first aim of the review was to consider the duties Powys CC have in relation to homelessness and reflect on how effectively they were being met. This involved exploring each duty in the process.

- **Section 60 – The Duty to provide free & accessible housing advice and information**

In considering the effectiveness of meeting this duty, the review first explored information on the Council's website and the process that people use to access housing services when they first want to present a problem.

The review found that the current website offered some legal information but might not be as 'user friendly' as it could be. It highlights the approach taken in Newport,

which allows people to update their housing situation on-line and receive a plan of potential next steps.

To make first contact in Powys a household needs to telephone the 'first contact officer' who will assess the housing situation of the applicant and refer on to Housing Management & Options Officers accordingly. They then respond to the household, depending on the urgency of the case.

A 'mystery shopper' exercise undertaken by Shelter Cymru found some issues with this approach, i.e. people not getting their urgent housing needs met and being left unsure of next steps. Powys has taken steps since these findings to ensure a more effective service. However, it does raise the question in relation to the current response and whether the current IT approach adopted in Newport and other Welsh local authorities would offer a more effective service.

- **Section 62 – The duty to undertake an assessment**

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

Currently there are 22 Housing Management and Options Officers (HMOOs), situated in different areas across the County; who as part of their broader housing role undertake these assessments. Additionally, the Service has recently recruited 3 Homelessness Prevention & Housing Options Officers who will work on more in-depth cases.

The review found that the number of these assessments differed quite significantly between areas in Powys. The offices in Newtown and Welshpool undertook 71% of these assessments. The reason for this needs to be considered in more detail, but in relation to developing services the authority needs to reflect on how it targets resources.

- **Section 66 – The duty to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness**

This duty is again owed to all households, regardless of whether they may be 'priority need' or have a local connection. It expects local authorities to deliver services to all those at threat of homelessness within 56 days and the Council needs to evidence that it has taken 'reasonable steps to prevent it'.

Through analysis of the statistics recorded a high proportion of those presenting at this stage are facing homelessness from the private rented sector. This is higher than the national average and poses the question about whether enough support is available to both tenants and landlords in the sector.

The figures also indicate a low success rate in preventing homelessness at this stage through mediation and financial advice. It was suggested this could be that HMOOs are not recording the work they do effectively. However, it does raise questions about the delivery of these services and whether they are sufficient.

- **Section 73 – The duty to take reasonable steps to alleviate homelessness**

This duty is triggered when it is no longer possible to prevent. Once more, all households are eligible for this assistance. The expectation is that all reasonable steps are taken to house, regardless of the household's priority need or local connection.

At this stage the figures indicate that the private rented sector is used heavily. Evidence from discussions indicates that this is putting significant strain on the sector and if the solution found is not sustainable it can often lead to repeat presentations.

There is also a proportion of households at this stage who are proving very difficult to house. They are likely to be single and will not necessarily meet the priority need criteria. However, they may lead quite chaotic lifestyles involving substance misuse, etc. This group not only prove very difficult to house, but also create high demands on a variety of services; including Health, Social Services and criminal justice.

Feedback suggests that to meet the housing and other needs of this group the authority needs to explore its approach and consider whether it needs to exceed its statutory duties to save costs across agencies. This should be explored in partnership with all relevant agencies, and especially Supporting People funded services.

- **Section 75 – The Duty to House**

This duty applies once all other options have failed and the household is assessed as having a priority need for housing.

Since the introduction of the Act a local authority can now discharge this duty into the private rented sector and this was utilised for 22% of households during 2016-17. This is further evidence of greater demands on this sector.

Feedback from staff suggests that those who reach this stage often have a variety of complex needs, solutions can prove very difficult and a great deal of time is spent in meeting their needs.

To reflect this demand the Council are employing three new Homeless Prevention and Housing Options Officers to undertake detailed casework, support and linking in with other agencies for this group. These posts will need to link and complement local policy intentions to ensure they are deployed most effectively. The Council also have an action plan to reduce the void periods for its own stock.

As part of the review the approach taken to Homelessness was discussed with Shelter Cymru. They have identified a change of approach in the County since the introduction of the Act. They feel that officers are now focussing more on prevention, although they see first-hand the challenges encountered in relation to sourcing appropriate options.

However, they still witness ‘value judgements’ being made by officers and feel the response a household receives does, to some extent, depend on the Council officer that is dealing with case. To remedy this, they suggest more training for officers and to ensure a deeper understanding of the presenting characteristics of some households and the reasons for these.

## **Part 2 – The Local Policy Context**

An overarching vision for services in Powys, (Vision 2025), includes the aim to ensure affordable housing options and both the Powys Public Service Board’s Well Being Plan and the Housing Strategy emphasise the need to develop the type of housing people ‘want’ and is affordable.

To meet objectives contained within these overarching plans and to successfully meet the duties in the Act, the County needs to work in partnership with a variety of service areas. These areas will now be explored;

- **Linking Homeless Prevention with Supporting People Services**

Approximately half of the County’s Supporting People budget is funding services with the primary aim of supporting households to prevent homelessness. This funding plays a key role in meeting the duties within the Housing Act and the Welsh Government have encouraged all authorities to model services to reflect the prevention of homelessness agenda.

The Supporting People Team have undertaken a great deal of work to understand how services can best be delivered and will be re-tendering services this year to develop a locality-based approach to deliver support.

This aims to develop ‘one support service’ in each area of Powys working with the purpose to prevent homelessness and keep people on an ‘even keel’. This might include a variety of agencies, but they will develop ‘local intelligence’ within each area and utilise this to ‘turn off demand’ as early as possible.

Any strategy developed needs to reflect how these locality services can work in partnership with those who are undertaking the statutory function and explore how services can be modelled to best meet needs and meet them early. Effectively, these support services, if delivered early enough can ‘turn off’ demand for the statutory duties.

The other key consideration in relation to Supporting People funded services is to explore how they can be utilised to support those with the most complex needs who are currently so difficult to find solutions for.

The strategy needs to consider how Powys could deliver an assertive /‘Housing First’ type of approach to ensure support services for this group are complementing the work delivered by the newly created Homeless Prevention and Housing Options Officers.

- **The Private Rented Sector**

The Housing Act has allowed local authorities to utilise the private rented sector to a greater degree in discharging their homelessness duties. Discussions suggest this has led to far greater pressures on the sector.

The authority currently employs two members of staff, (Private Rented Sector Development Officer), who work in close partnership with the Welsh Government funded 'Bond Scheme' run by Gwalia Housing Association.

The authority has an extensive 'offer' in relation how it will support landlords who house people who are homeless or potentially homeless. As the use of the private rented sector has increased the demands on staff to meet the needs of landlords have also risen.

The authority has recently appointed a Social Lettings Agency Project Officer for three years who will be exploring the development of a social lettings agency to help meet this demand and any strategy needs to reflect on whether the appropriate resources are in place to meet these ever-increasing demands of the landlords it is working with.

- **Social Housing**

Social housing continues to play a significant role in supporting the Council to meet its housing duties. The role it plays in meeting these duties needs to be considered in light of the current review of the Common Housing Register (CHR). Housing Associations contribute to preventing and alleviating homelessness via the CHR and the current review by Imogen Blood Associates is an opportunity to enhance the contribution associations can make.

The void period in the local authorities own stock needs to be addressed and could alleviate the pressures on the private rented sector.

To assist in meeting the supply the strategy needs to consider the possibility of re-designating some low demand older persons accommodation and consider the development of new single person accommodation to help meet the needs identified.

The role social housing staff could play in the locality teams being delivered by Supporting People, (and, as will be discussed, by Health and Social Services), in relation to preventing homelessness also needs to be considered.

- **Social Services & Health**

The Welsh Government's Social Services and Well Being Act has introduced a far greater emphasis on a preventative approach to delivering health and social services. In light of this the authority is developing an approach through a Health and Care Strategy which focusses on doing 'what matters' for people and delivering it as early as possible.

The strategy has advocated the development of a community hub approach which mirrors the locality services being developed by Supporting People and synergies are being explored and need to be pursued within the homelessness strategy.

The 'Community Health & Well-Being Coordination service is being delivered through PAVO and employs 'Community Connectors' to help people navigate services in every 'hub' in the County. There is potential to work in partnership with this service to deliver early intervention in relation to homelessness and accessing the right support.

- **Children & Young People's Partnership / Young People**

In light of the Social Services and Well Being Act and its emphasis on prevention the Children's and Young People's Partnership has developed a programme of 'Prevention and Early Intervention.

This plan includes the development of locality-based service networks which mirror the approach discussed throughout this document. The Youth Intervention Service is part of this and currently exists to work with young people and is jointly commissioned by Children's Services and Supporting People.

This service works with young people to intervene early and prevent homelessness wherever possible. This service fits ideally with the broader strategic direction and is a good example of how partnership working can be developed.

- **The Introduction of Universal Credit**

Universal Credit is replacing 6 means tested benefits and will be introduced in Powys for all new claimants, and those who experience a change of circumstance, from October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

There are significant concerns the introduction of the benefit will lead to an increase in housing problems, rent arrears and homelessness. The fears centre on the fact the rent element of the benefit will go directly to the tenant, rather than the landlord.

To avoid issues it was agreed with representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions that there was a need to work in partnership to ensure that people are supported and advised early.

The Job Centres in Powys would welcome co-location of advice staff within their offices to tackle potential issues and respond early.

### **Part 3 – Priorities to Consider**

Following on from the analysis undertaken the following priorities have been identified for consideration within any strategy developed;

- **The development of an IT solution to record, manage and self-assess homelessness enquiries, presentations and applications**

The current recording mechanisms remain basic and the authority should explore the use of a comprehensive system to allow them to manage, prioritise and record homelessness cases. There is currently no facility for persons to enquire and self-assess their current circumstances. The authority should work with neighbouring Councils who have adopted existing IT solutions and explore how they could be utilised in Powys

- **The development of a partnership approach with SP funded agencies, prevention hubs and community connectors**

The local policy direction is consistent in adopting a locality approach to ensure services are as accessible as possible, as early as possible. This approach offers opportunities to work in partnership to prevent homelessness and support households early.

The role of Supporting People funded services will be crucial in developing this approach and how their newly commissioned locality teams work effectively together with those Council staff who are undertaking the homelessness function needs to be a priority.

Similarly, the broader policy direction around prevention, early intervention and locality hubs being pursued by Health & Social Services reflects the direction being pursued by Supporting People services and the opportunities to ensure all services can complement the prevention of homelessness agenda.

- **To reflect the greater demand being placed on the private rented sector, allocate extra resources accordingly**

The Housing (Wales) Act allows homelessness duties to be discharged into the private rented sector. This has led to greater pressure being placed on the sector and evidence suggests that current resources are not sufficient to adequately support landlords.

The Council is researching the development of a social lettings agency and this needs to reflect on what the authority is offering landlords in terms of support and how it will deliver on it.

It is also unclear the impact of the void/empty property turn around in the Council's stock on the private rented sector. The Council needs to improve its void performance therefore making more of its stock available in a timely manner to homeless persons.

- **Develop intensive and assertive support services for those most difficult to house**

Evidence suggests that those with complex needs continue to create high demand on services. Not just housing services, but also Health, Social Services and criminal justice agencies.

Not all these households are necessarily owed a full housing duty, but housing managers recognise that this should not prohibit work to meet these needs and support them to find sustainable housing solutions.

The development of a service for this group of households needs to be explored. Supporting People funding maybe necessary to deliver this service, but it should also work in close partnership with other agencies to deliver on a variety of demands. The newly appointed Homeless Prevention and Housing Options Officers should also play a central role in developing any service model.

- **Explore the co-location of staff within Job Centre Plus to assist households through the transition on to Universal Credit**

The prevent rent arrears and homelessness for those households moving on to Universal Credit the Council should explore whether staff could be located within Job Centres in the County to advise and support those who will be receiving their rent directly through the new benefit system.

## **Powys Homelessness Review**

### **Part 1 – Introduction, methodology & policy / legal context**

#### **1.1 Introduction & purpose of this document**

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has a requirement for all Welsh local authorities 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 Powys. Not only focussing on its housing services, but also exploring the policy context in which they exist and whether the response to homelessness is complimentary to the wider strategic direction within the County.

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**

The review aimed to ensure a wide range of input. 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 has utilised existing information on homelessness which is available through the statistics collected for the Welsh Government
- The review has explored the national policy context in relation to homelessness
- The review has explored the local policy context and considered how the delivery of homelessness can complement and reflect it

- The review has drawn from the Homelessness Workshops organised by the Council which have included all key stakeholders
- The review has interviewed key representatives from all relevant service areas; including housing / homelessness, social services, health, the private rented sector support team, landlords and lettings agencies, the Supporting People Team, a representative from the Children's and Young People's Partnership, those working in criminal justice, agencies delivering support and social housing providers
- The review has undertaken focus groups with people who have been through homelessness and voluntary sector organisations working with those who experience it
- The review has presented initial findings to the Local Member 'Tackling Poverty (Cross Party) Group'
- The review has presented findings to the County's 'Strategic Housing Partnership'

There were aspects of the findings which influenced how the review developed. As issues / priorities were highlighted as the interviews were undertaken it 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.

In the following section we explore the policy direction around homelessness, the significant new duties that have been introduced by the Act and review how each of these is currently being delivered by the authority.

### **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 Welsh Government 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 a new Housing (Wales) Act was introduced to reflect this emphasis on prevention. The Act introduced several new duties. To meet these duties local authorities could hopefully continue with services which for many local authorities had already been established. It is very much a key aim of this review to determine if in Powys the appropriate services are in place and are meeting the duties introduced.

Following the introduction of the Act the Welsh Audit Office 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 local authorities still have some way to go and it states - "Local authorities continue to focus on managing people in crisis rather than stop it from happening". The findings of this report have informed this review in relation to the services delivered in Powys.

However, it is not just in the homelessness field that prevention is seen as key. Both Health and Social Services policies and legislation emanating from Welsh Government are 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 develop the effectiveness of homelessness services.

This review needs to reflect upon this and consider how agencies can work 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, the more we work in partnership to improve this, the less likely an individual / household will have a housing crisis and fall into homelessness.

We also can't ignore a substantial 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), offer a simple summary of how services could potentially move forward.



The diagram suggests that, traditionally, commissioners have focussed resources on providing the 'emergency response' which support households when they are experiencing a housing crisis.

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 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 this review needs to reflect upon what could be learned in relation to services in Powys and how they could potentially shift from the more traditional approach.

Therefore, Part 2 of this document focusses on how housing services are currently meeting these duties. Part 3 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 4 of the document then draws these two elements together to consider options which could be explored after the adoption of the Homelessness Strategy.

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

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 brought into force new duties on local authorities. 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 local authorities have been broadened quite significantly. Since the Act, local authorities now have a duty to assist all households who face homelessness, regardless if they 'fit' into the priority need categories. The following sections of the Act break down the responsibilities local authorities now have;

- 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 73 – Once the household has been assessed and found to be homeless, a duty to assist the household in resolving their homelessness

- Section 75 – Once the duty under section 73 has ended, if the household is homeless, has a local connection, is unintentionally homeless 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 a care leaver), the authority has a duty to house

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

## **Part 2 – Exploring how Powys are currently responding to homelessness duties**

### **2.1 Section 60 - The duty to provide accessible & free advice and information**

- **The Council website**

The internet is playing a far more important role in how most people are accessing information. We can only assume that this will often be the case with homelessness and it can therefore be assumed that the first place a person will potentially access for information will be the County's website.

When first looking at the website it doesn't appear to be particularly user friendly. There is a great deal of information relating to the legal duties of the Council, but less on where to seek help / who to call / where to present, etc.

To give us a better idea of how the current information is perceived and to develop ideas on how it could improve, the review asked people who had experience of using the Council's homeless service to assess it and feedback.

In relation to the website, service users felt that it was very 'dense' with "lots of words". They also thought a phone number to contact the Council should be more prevalently displayed.

It is worth reflecting that it is not possible at this stage for a person to complete and upload their housing issue to the Council through any kind of online form. This is possible in other authority areas, who have the IT systems in place for this to be completed by and then sent on to a housing options advisor.

The example below is from Newport. As can be seen from the illustration of the page on their website, the applicant is invited to complete information about their current housing situation, including about their current home, employment, financial circumstances and whether they have any support needs. As it states on the website;

"Completing this guide will not place you onto the Home Options Newport scheme but will provide you with general information, advice and options possibly open to you within the Newport area and explain how to access these"



## Housing Options

### Introduction

#### Welcome to the Housing Solutions Self Help Guide

The following questionnaire has been designed to help identify the housing services that are potentially available within Newport.

Completing this guide will not place you onto the Home Options Newport scheme but will provide you with general information, advice and options possibly open to you within the Newport area and explain how to access these.

The questionnaire takes approximately 10 - 15 minutes to complete and you will be provided with an action plan that details the options that may be suitable to you based on your responses to the series of set questions. The action plan can be updated at anytime and is not intended to provide detailed and specific advice as this is available from the agencies and organisations listed within the action plan on the various options.

Some of the available options include:

- Low Cost Home Ownership
- Mutual Exchange
- Private Rented Housing
- Sheltered housing
- Additional support
- Money or benefits advice
- Supported housing
- Homelessness prevention



[Get Started](#)

- **The First Contact**

When a person wants to contact the Council for housing advice they are first directed to call the generic contact number and discuss their case with the 'First Contact Officer' (FCO). This position delivers a broad role and is utilised by the Council to field calls on all matters in relation to housing, not just homelessness.

The FCO has questions to ask to determine the household's housing need and the next step to take. For example, if the caller is homeless with nowhere to go, the FCO will pass on immediately to the duty housing officer if they are at threat of homelessness they will be contacted within 4 days.

In discussion with service users all were positive in relation to the advice they had received from the Council when they first approached. Some had phoned and some had approached an office directly.

A 'mystery shopper' exercise was undertaken by Shelter Cymru in March 2017, where people who had experienced homelessness 'tested' the Powys response. The report states that - "Most participants felt they received a genuinely helpful service from the First Contact Officers". Those going through the exercise were positive in relation to the response - "Couldn't really ask for more, very polite, not rushed in them asking me questions and gave me time to answer"

However, there were some issues identified. The participants were unsure what the next steps would be once they had finished contact and the 2 'shoppers' who presented as 'homeless on the day' did not feel there was any urgency and did not get any response on the same day.

The consultation with voluntary sector agencies and Councillors at the 'Tackling Poverty (Cross Party) Group' also raised concerns about how difficult it was to access advice and support. There were also issues raised by social housing providers at the 'Strategic Housing Partnership'.

Since the mystery shopping exercise has been undertaken the Council has utilised the findings and changed its process to ensure those who are homeless get the urgent response they need.

However, the Council should explore the introduction of the 'web-based' application approach which exists in Newport, Ceredigion and other local authorities in Wales. By allowing households to submit their housing issues utilising such a system they can then be allocated to relevant staff based on how urgent they are. It could also allow advice agencies such as Shelter Cymru and other support agencies to be accessed early

## **2.2 Section 62 - The duty to assess**

As discussed, another duty introduced by the Housing (Wales) Act is the duty to assess everyone who maybe homeless or threatened with homelessness. This should be completed with all those who approach the authority with concerns in relation to their housing situation.

The authority has no specific 'Housing Options' team to deliver this assessment service. 22 (FTE) Housing Management and Options Officers (HMOO) are based in different areas across the County.

The role of these officers is far broader than homelessness. They have responsibility for a patch of Council Housing and manage rent collection, housing and estate management, allocations, managing the waiting list for the area; as well as the homelessness function.

In discussions with HMOO's they identified the collection of rent as their primary focus. They have weekly targets to meet and see this as important in terms of maintaining income for the authority.

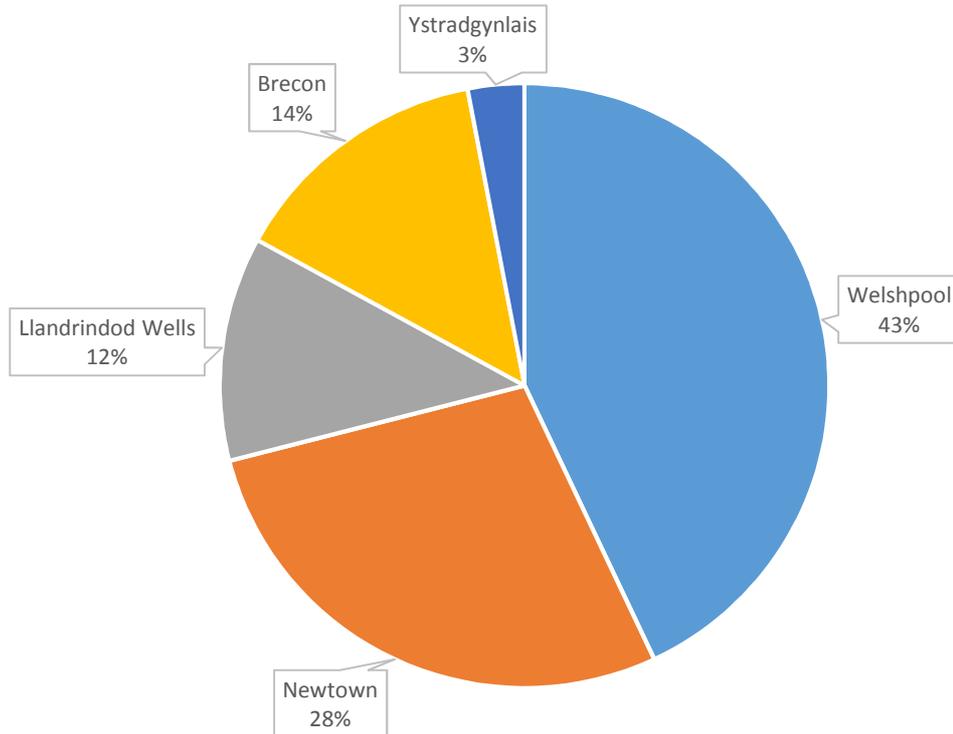
In relation to the homelessness part of the role this was identified as the most demanding. "No case is ever the same" and they highlighted how finding solutions for many households remains very difficult.

The following table shows the number of assessments undertaken in the last 3 years;

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of assessments undertaken</b>
2015-16	468
2016-17	513
2017-18	383

The numbers approaching the authority and being assessed differ quite significantly across the County. The following chart identifies where in the County households presented and an assessment was undertaken;

## Proportion of homeless presentations by housing area 2016 - 2017



The table indicates far greater demand in the North of the County. (Newtown and Welshpool offices undertook 71% of assessments).

The review sought to understand the differences in demand and there were a variety of issues identified.

For example, the housing market in the North of the County was perceived as more fluid with a greater proportion of private rented sector stock at affordable rates and therefore the potential for higher turnover. One reason cited for the high demand in Welshpool was the recently improved trainlines to the Shrewsbury / West Midlands, etc. which has led to greater demand on local housing as it allows workers to commute across the border.

Also, despite there being less demand in the South of the County it has been highlighted that finding solutions can be more difficult, so despite there being less cases the time taken with each case can be significantly longer.

In relation to moving forward and informing the strategy, we do need to consider these differences and consider how and where services are commissioned and delivered to reflect demand.

### **2.3 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;

Year	Households found to be threat of homelessness
2015-16	213
2016-17	174
2017-18	128

The introduction of this duty reflects the importance Welsh Government 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'.

The Welsh Government expects the local authority to be able to evidence the 'reasonable steps' it has taken to prevent homelessness with all these households. Examples of the type of assistance that would evidence this would include;

- Mediation and discussion between young people and their parents to allow them to stay at home
- Mediation and discussion with landlord or mortgage lender to resolve tenancy issue or allow extra time
- The use of homelessness prevention fund, e.g. to pay for private rented sector deposit
- The use of discretionary housing payments
- Financial advice to help prioritise debts, etc.
- Target hardening measures for those suffering domestic abuse

To successfully discharge this duty the household can either be supported to remain in their own home or be found alternative accommodation before they actually become homeless.

At present this duty to try and prevent homelessness is the responsibility of the HMOOs. The review was able to analyse the data from the first 9 months of this financial year (2017-18) and it's valuable to explore what it tells us;

- **Households at threat of losing their private rented accommodation**

Approximately 50% of households found to be at threat of homelessness were losing their accommodation in the private rented sector (PRS). The national average is only 36%. The fact this is so much higher in Powys needs to be considered.

The reasons more people are becoming homeless through losing their accommodation in the PRS can be varied. HMOOs and the Private Rented Sector Development Officer cited landlords selling properties, letting to those who are working rather than on benefits, as well as affordability issues for tenants.

Whatever the reasons for households losing their private rented accommodation, it does raise the question if there is enough support being delivered within the sector to support both tenants and landlords. This will be explored in further detail later in this document.

- **Households found alternative accommodation**

The second figure which is interesting to explore is the proportion of people at this stage who don't remain in their current home but are found alternative accommodation to prevent their homelessness.

- 35% have their homelessness prevented through being found alternative accommodation in social housing and;
- 45% have their homelessness prevented through being found alternative accommodation in the private rented sector

This is a significant proportion but reflects the average in Wales. It should be noted that there is a considerable amount of work involved. Finding and supporting a household into new accommodation, whether in the social or private sector is likely to be time consuming.

- **Mediation & Financial Advice**

The final figures recorded should be considered are the number of households who had their homelessness prevented through 'mediation & conciliation' and through 'financial advice'.

Over the first 9 months of this financial year only 1 household was recorded as having homelessness prevented through mediation and one through financial advice. Over 2016-17 this figure nationally equated to 17% of households having their homelessness prevented through mediation and 12% through financial advice.

In discussions with HMOOs there was a suggestion that this work might not always be recorded. If this is the case, it is worth exploring how this could be made simpler and ensured. However, it also raises the question if enough focus is being placed on delivering mediation and financial advice and this an area any strategy should consider.

How services are delivered to those households who are at threat of homelessness needs to be explored. Should it necessarily continue only with HMOOs, or could it be delivered in partnership with other agencies? As commissioning developments in other service areas are explored, this will be reflected upon.

## **2.4 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 authority currently has a variety of temporary accommodation spread across the County for this purpose. Stock is located in Newtown, Welshpool, Llandrindod Wells, Machynlleth, Brecon & Ystradgynalis. Some of this owned by the Council, some by

Housing Associations and some leased from private landlords. The authority also utilises its own housing stock at times and can allocate a general needs property on a temporary basis; either for a family, but also for single people to share. Some is supported on a 24hr basis, some receiving floating support from local agencies and some has no formal support provision; although it is available when needed.

Discussions with relevant staff suggest that demand on this stock is increasing, especially in Newtown and Welshpool. Bed and Breakfast accommodation is still being used and at any one time there are likely to be at least one or two households in this type of accommodation. It is sometimes used for young people and an example was cited of how effective this can be with a particular B&B owner who develops positive relationships with the young people.

In discussion with a variety of agencies there were concerns in relation to the need for households to move considerable distances to access existing properties. Ystradgynlais has accommodation which is commonly utilised for people outside that area. Concerns were expressed in relation to the lack of support networks which are accessible for those households who have to move from their home area. However, with the County covering such a large geographical area this is difficult to avoid.

There are plans to create alternative / additional provision and the authority are exploring the development of 'pods' which can be erected swiftly on Council land and potentially be moved to meet demand. By developing such provision, it is hoped that options can be developed which will allow household to remain in the area of the County they want to be whenever possible.

## **2.5 Section 73 - The duty to take reasonable steps to alleviate homelessness**

The next significant duty introduced is the duty to take reasonable steps to alleviate homelessness for those who are homeless, and it can no longer be prevented. Once again, this duty applies to all households regardless of any priority need.

The following table indicates the number of households who have been found homeless since the introduction of the Act. (These figures will include a proportion of households who have presented to the authority at threat of homelessness, where it was not possible to prevent).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of household found homeless</b>
2015-16	174
2016-17	288
2017-18	231

At this stage re-housing is the only option. Feedback from interviews suggests that the solutions available are very different depending on the area of Powys. For example, options in Brecon may be far more limited, (where affordability issues are prohibitive), than in area such as Ystradgynlais.

The data also tells us that at this stage in the process the private rented sector is used heavily. 63% of households who have their homelessness resolved are placed

in the private rented sector. As discussed with the private sector team, this is leading to significant pressures and there are fears that this is leading to short term solutions and households can often return.

### **Single people with complex needs**

One significant issue which needs to be highlighted at this stage are the difficulties being experienced by those with the most complex needs. These households are often single and therefore may not meet any of the priority need criteria.

Despite this there are still duties the Council has in assisting these households. The feedback suggests that this group is posing increasing difficulties. Their demands are not simply on housing services, but a variety of agencies; including health, criminal justice, the police and other council services.

In discussion, it has been suggested that it is time to develop a combined approach for this group that goes beyond the actual duties we have and offers a far more comprehensive and multi-agency approach.

This will need to be agreed across agencies and Supporting People services will need to play a major part of any response.

### **2.5 Section 75 – The Duty to House**

This is effectively the final duty for those households whose homelessness has not been able to be prevented or relieved. This duty is only applicable to those who are determined to have a priority need, are unintentionally homeless and are eligible to be housed on a temporary basis if there are no immediate longer-term options. The local authority can discharge this duty in either social housing or the private rented sector.

The following table indicates the number of households accepted under this duty since the introduction of the Act;

<b>Year</b>	<b>Full housing duty accepted</b>
2015-16	33
2016-17	69
2017-18	64

The figures indicate an ever-increasing number of households being owed this duty. HMOO's highlighted the ever more complex nature of the households presenting and the difficulty in finding these households solutions.

Mental ill health and substance misuse issues were highlighted as particularly prevalent in these complex cases.

Affordability of housing was certainly an issue, but it was stated that other factors ran far deeper than simply housing and even when a suitable housing solution was found it did not always mean that this would prove sustainable due to the other issues involved.

Recent research has indicated the prevalence of 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' within the homeless population and this is particularly the case for those who have the most complex needs and are creating such high demand on services. Any response developed needs to consider the complex nature of the issues involved and explore how services can reflect this.

In response to this the Council has agreed to employ three new staff to focus on working with the most complex cases. These officers, (Homeless Prevention and Housing Options Officers), will offer detailed casework with those households and work intensely to both support the household to find suitable accommodation, but also look to link and work in partnership with other agencies to ensure the household's support needs are met.

These posts will offer vital support for the HMOO role and it should be ensured that they complement and reflect broader policy intentions locally which will be considered in the next section.

Although they will work with those with a full housing duty and priority need they will also work with other 'vulnerable' people and therefore can also focus on supporting meet the duties to help prevent and alleviate homelessness for those with complex needs.

- **The Views of Shelter Cymru**

As part of the review Shelter Cymru staff were interviewed for their thoughts on how Powys CC were meeting homelessness duties.

Shelter Cymru offer legal advice; as well as generic housing advice and homelessness prevention activity throughout the County. They have one member of staff focusing on the North and one in the South.

They have identified a change of approach in the County since the introduction of the Act. They feel that officers are now focussing more on prevention, although they see first-hand the challenges encountered in relation to sourcing appropriate options.

However, they still witness 'value judgements' being made by officers and feel the response a household receives does, to some extent, depend on the Council officer that is dealing with case. To remedy this, they suggest more training for officers and to ensure a deeper understanding of the presenting characteristics of some households and the reasons for these. They still feel the culture within the authority needs to move away from one of 'box ticking'; to a more person-centred approach.

In relation to the issue of rough sleeping and those with the most complex needs, they too have seen a significant increase in demand from these households. They still believe a 'night shelter' type approach, in partnership with churches, might be necessary, but they would also welcome a move towards 'Housing First' principles.

### **Part 3 - The Local Policy Context**

Having explored each of the duties introduced by the Housing (Wales) Act and how Powys are currently delivering them, it is now worth examining the broader context in which they must be delivered.

Powys County Council has set out a vision, (Vision 2025), which sets out its policy direction over the coming years. Any homelessness strategy needs to consider this vision and ensure it is working to the same aims.

The 2025 vision includes a priority to support its residents and communities and includes the objective that “communities have access to a choice of both affordable and market housing”.

This is reflected in both the Powys Public Service Board’s Well Being Plan and the county’s Housing Strategy.

The Well Being Plan stating a desire to see- “People have more choice and can access the type of homes they want. Advances in technology ensures good access to affordable housing”; whereas the Housing Strategy pledges to develop a homelessness strategy with an emphasis to “work in partnership with key stakeholders to prevent, where possible, the incidence of homelessness and where this isn’t possible to seek the most positive outcome for the citizen”

We will first explore those areas which are part of the broader housing function and how we can ensure we are working in partnership to prevent homelessness.

#### **3.1 Linking Homeless Prevention with Supporting People Services**

Supporting People 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 local authorities.

In Powys there is a Supporting People budget of £5.1m. Approximately half of this is used to support people with learning disabilities and older people, whilst the remainder is focussed on delivering services for people who are at threat of homelessness. This includes people struggling with mental ill health, young people, those experiencing domestic abuse, those with substance misuse issues, ex-offenders and those who have become homeless.

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 the Housing (Wales) Act.

Powys has adopted this approach and recognises the important role Supporting People services play in the prevention of homelessness.

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, i.e. are delivered early before crisis wherever possible.

From the evidence gathered during this work the team have concluded that services should be established to work area by area in Powys, rather than having 'specialist' services delivering support to specific groups. This does not mean that no specialist support will be delivered, just that it becomes more integrated with other support services in any area.

This year the team is planning to establish and tender for locality-based support services which will be based in all major towns in Powys. The aim of this exercise will be to re-model support so that in each area there is one support service, which may have a variety of agencies delivering it, but they will be working in partnership as one 'team'.

The support service in each area will be available to anyone in that area who has a demand for support, i.e. they need help to maintain their tenancy and keep their lives on an 'even keel'.

As the service develops the teams will develop 'local intelligence' and retain all the people they are supporting as part of the service. This does not mean that they will continue to support everyone who is 'signed up', but each individual will know they are available if they want to be supported again. However, the team will also utilise their 'local intelligence' to keep a watching brief on the people they have supported and try and intervene as early as possible if there are indications that they require additional support.

By focussing the teams within a locality, the Supporting People Team believe they will be able to deliver a more cost-effective service with less travel time, but also by successfully utilising their 'local intelligence' and delivering support as early as possible the demand for other cost intensive services will be 'turned off'.

In relation to this review we need to explore how these new locality 'support teams' can work.

- How can we ensure that they work with people at threat of homelessness as early as possible?
- How can we utilise these teams to 'turn off' demand to the HMOS and successfully prevent homelessness?
- To achieve this, do we need to bring these teams together, so they are working in partnership to meet needs and prevent homelessness?
- How could we potentially utilise an IT system to ensure that caseloads can be allocated to both HMOS and locality support teams to prevent homelessness?
- How could they be prioritised to best meet needs and ensure homelessness is prevented wherever possible?

- Could those who are at threat of homelessness be supported through the locality teams and allow the HMOOs to focus on those whose homelessness can't be prevented?
- Even better, how can housing needs be picked up earlier and support delivered to avoid duties being triggered?

There is currently a pilot being undertaken in Welshpool where support services and the HMOOs are working in partnership to ensure that support is being delivered to those households who are at threat of homelessness or have become homeless and have identified support needs.

This pilot is proving successful so far, but more work will need be continued to see how it can progress and evolve.

In discussions with Supporting People staff involved in the pilot they stressed that the best learning is gained through delivery, rather than commissioning and this was proving to be the case. This learning included HMOOs developing a much better understanding of the complexities of the 'support relationship' and it's not necessarily always the fault of the support provider if the support delivered doesn't achieve the desired outcomes.

They also reflected on how people from different agencies are often working to a different 'purpose'. Some of the key learning points have been the acceptance of this, developing a deeper understanding of the different 'purpose' different agencies have and then moving forward to find some shared objectives and 'purpose' in order to meet the needs of households.

As discussed earlier in the document, the statistics recorded suggest there are proportionally fewer households prevented from becoming homeless through mediation and financial advice services than the national average.

Therefore, is there is scope to explore whether these services could be delivered through the locality teams? Could the support being developed in each locality work in partnership with HMOO's to deliver these services to help prevent homelessness?

There is also the issue of the differing levels of demand for a homelessness response in the different areas of the county. With 71% of homelessness assessments being undertaken in Welshpool and Newtown, does this suggest that support services should be commissioned to reflect this greater level of demand and have increased resources in the locality areas in the north of the county?

- **The role of Supporting People in delivering support for those with the most complex needs**

As discussed, there remain households who are creating large demands on housing and other services who are unable to retain stable housing and can often end in sofa surfing or even in extreme cases rough sleeping. They will often 'fall out' of priority need groups and therefore the Council may not have a legal duty to house.

It is recognised that there is the need to develop services for this group of people which do not simply aim to meet housing duties but take a more corporate approach

to meeting this groups needs and reduce demand on other services. The Housing Service see Supporting People services as playing a crucial role in delivering an element of the support to meet the needs of this group.

To achieve this, it cannot be the role of housing alone. All relevant agencies will need to be engaged. Health, adult services, the police, probation and social services will need to play their part. Importantly though, they will need to be engaged in the commissioning of any service, as well as then delivering it operationally, e.g. through case conferencing.

There are examples across Wales & the UK of support services developed for this group. For example, in Ynys Mon a 'Housing First' approach has been adopted and a service is being delivered to support single homeless people. In Ceredigion the 'Corporation St' project has been developed with support offering a high degree of psychologically informed practice.

As the locality teams are developed it is important to explore how support can be delivered for this group. It is often difficult for people with a variety of issues to engage with services and examples of assertive approaches should be considered. Due to the rural nature of Powys and the relatively small number of cases likely to be in each area, how the service operates without the need for new cost intensive accommodation options also needs to be explored.

Any service developed also needs to work in partnership with the newly appointed Homeless Prevention and Housing Options Officers.

- **The future of Supporting People Funding**

There remains some uncertainty in relation to the future of the Supporting People fund. The Welsh Government Budget indicates the grant will be merged with other funds (Families First, Communities First & Flying Start) to become the "Early Intervention – Prevention and Support Grant".

This would allow Powys 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 and threats of how this proposed merged grant could impact upon the prevention of homelessness services currently being delivered.

### **3.2 The Private Rented Sector**

As discussed, since the introduction of the Housing Act local authorities can discharge their housing duties into the private rented sector if it's for at least six months and is deemed affordable.

To help access suitable accommodation in the private rented sector the authority employs two 'Private Rented Sector Development Officers' who work very closely with the Welsh Government funded 'Bond Scheme' which is managed by Gwalia and employs one member of staff. The second Private Rented Sector Development Officer was only appointed recently (fixed term to March 2020).

The key purpose of both these services is to access properties in the private rented sector to prevent and manage homelessness. The services work with private landlords and offer the following services;

- By being available if there are issues with tenancies to support landlords
- Assessment of accommodation using Housing Health and Safety Rating System [HHSRS]
- Pre-tenancy Work. Tenants are assessed for affordability and suitability, referenced
- Assisting with the drawing up of bespoke tenancy agreements.
- Assistance with arrangement for safety certificates
- Notification to utility companies on change of tenancy
- Post tenancy—continued support for you and your tenants in their new home to help sustain the tenancy
- Periodic Property Inspections
- Negotiating of bond disputes Notify you of rent arrears and negotiate repayments with tenants
- Advise on steps to end the tenancy if the rent account falls into arrears due to being unable to afford it etc
- Handle reports of disrepair and co-ordinate repairs if required
- By offering financial support for tenants when setting up a new tenancy
- By identifying and contacting new landlords to work with
- Being available for referrals from the HMOOs and HPHOOs to support them house those who are threatened with homelessness or homeless

This list is taken from the current 'Landlord Pack' and offers an extensive and comprehensive service for landlords.

However, since this list of how the Council would assist was devised the use of the private rented sector for housing vulnerable households has undoubtedly grown significantly.

- 45% of those prevented from becoming homeless are re-housed in the PRS.
- 63% of households whose homelessness is relieved are found a housing solution at the Section 73 stage are housed in the private rented sector.
- Over 2016-17 22% of those housed following the final duty were found accommodation in the private rented sector.

In discussions with the Private Rented Sector Development Officer and the Bond scheme there was evidence of the pressure they are currently feeling to deliver the service.

They cited numerous issues around affordability due to welfare reform, landlords leaving the market because of perceived increase in 'paperwork' due to the national registration scheme, as well as a lack of understanding in relation to private rented sector among HMOOs.

There was also feedback from both the Private Sector Development Officer and a local Councillor that the authority needs to improve communication with landlords in

a time when there is a great deal of change, both in terms of the national registration / licensing scheme and welfare reform. The suggestion was made to re-establish local landlord forum to help engage and educate landlords of the changes. This is worth exploring, but the amount of resources needed to set up and facilitate needs to be considered.

The current offer the Council is offering private landlords is comprehensive. The question that needs to be asked is whether the current resources are sufficient to meet it?

With the more central role the private rented sector is playing in the housing of vulnerable people and those who are homeless or at threat of homelessness the strategy developed must explore how extra resources can be delivered within the private rented sector to support the landlords who are housing people who can often find it difficult to manage and maintain a tenancy.

The authority has now appointed a new member of staff to research the development of a 'social lettings agency'. This post will "take a leading role in researching, establishing, promoting, and managing a Social Lettings Agency across the diverse private sector markets in Powys".

This 'social lettings agency' will look to recruit landlords across Powys and offer to take over the management of properties, mirroring what a traditional lettings agency provides. Potentially it will charge landlords for this service, but how this will operate will be explored as part of its development.

The proposal is to develop this service over and above what already exists, so the 'Private Rented Sector Development Officer' role, as well as the Gwalia bond scheme will continue. It will need to be considered how both these services complement and work in partnership with the new service to avoid any duplication. Since the review has been undertaken the authority have also advertised and appointed another Development Officer so that resources are sufficient, although funding for the second post is in place only until March 2020.

### **3.3 Social Housing**

Social housing continues to play a significant role in supporting the Council to meet its housing duties. Over the first 9 months of this year 45% of those who were found homeless had it alleviated by an allocation into social housing. Of those found to be owed the full housing duty over 2016-17, 53% had this duty discharged through accepting an offer in social housing.

Powys retains its own housing stock, and this plays a significant role in meeting homelessness duties. There are also 7 Housing Associations with stock within the County and the general feedback was that these were playing a positive role in assisting in meeting duties.

A common housing register is currently being developed which would should allow simpler access arrangements for those applying for social housing. A previous form of this, piloted in Newtown before the new Housing (Wales) Act was introduced,

reduced homelessness quite significantly. Any lessons from this exercise and how they could be applied moving forward should be considered.

Through consultation with the County's 'Strategic Housing Partnership', (which includes all the Housing Associations working in the area), the review considered some of the issues already discussed.

- There was broad agreement that current access to advice and help to meet housing needs was not fit for purpose. Those partners who'd had experiences in other authorities who had adopted an IT solution, (such as Ceredigion), were cited as far more effective and accessible.
- Another issue raised was the information sharing between those who assess the needs of those households applying for housing and those in Housing Associations who were expected to house them. Communication and more information about those to be housed was a priority if tenancies were to be sustainable
- They also highlighted the importance of recognising the very different housing markets that exist across Powys and to ensure that any solutions were 'local' to these different markets, rather than a County-wide approach

As discussed, the pressures are increasing on the private rented sector and this is only likely to further increase pressures on social housing which is deemed a more affordable and sustainable option.

Any strategy needs to consider how to develop more housing options in the social housing sector to help meet homelessness duties. The following are two examples which Powys could look to consider;

- **Re-designation of low demand sheltered housing stock**

Another possible option to free up supply of affordable options which has been suggested is the freeing up of some sheltered housing which is currently designated for older people.

Some concerns were raised by Members in relation to this idea. They feared it would destabilise the current mix within schemes and this would especially be the case if it was not implemented sensitively.

- **Making sure Social Housing Staff are playing a full part in Locality Teams**

As discussed, with the changes in how Supporting People is being commissioned and the development of locality teams it is important to explore how social housing staff can work in partnership with these teams. With the greater emphasis on developing 'intelligence' to ensure that people are advised, helped and supported as early as possible, it is important to develop the working relationship between those managing accommodation and the support teams in their locality.

It needs to be explored how housing management staff can access support services as early as possible and as soon as they identify potential issues within tenancies.

### 3.4 Social Services & Health

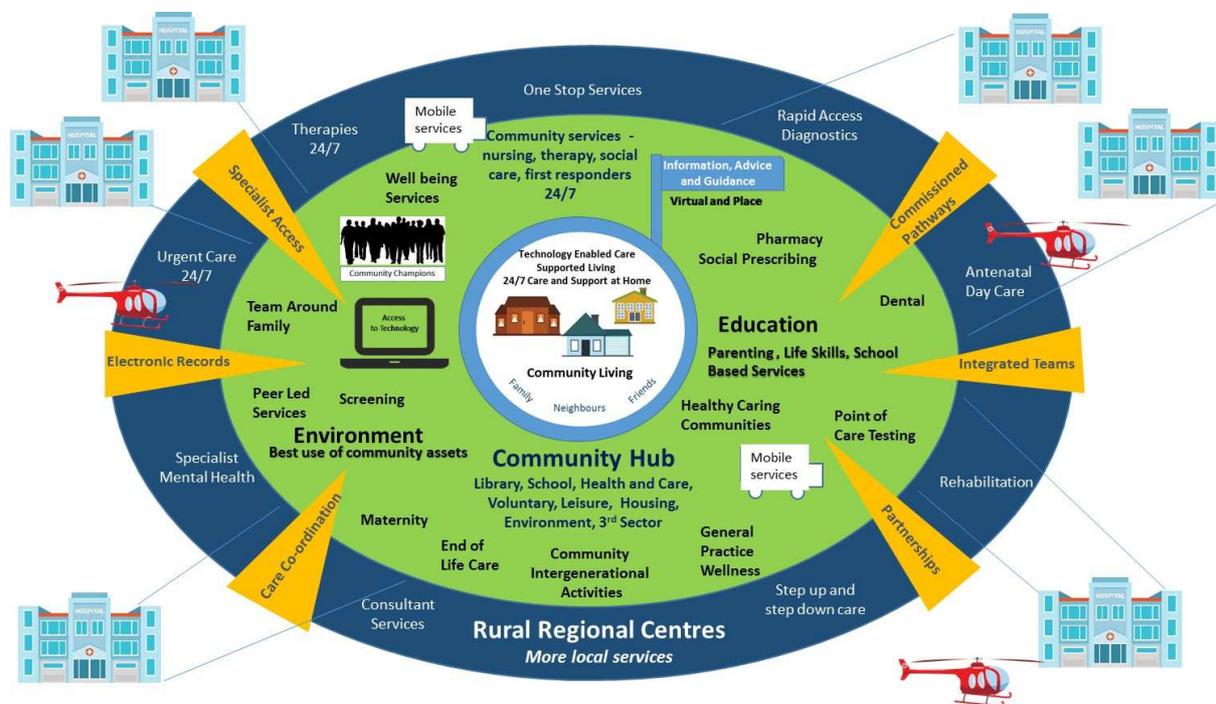
Social Services all are also working within a new statutory framework. The introduction of the Social Services and Well Being Act also places a far greater emphasis on delivering the right prevention services and easing the pressure on more costly alternatives.

This new environment has led to an approach being explored in Powys; which like managing and preventing homelessness; is attempting to ensure that people are supported as early as possible and their needs met. In partnership with Health services, they are implementing this approach through the 'Health & Care Strategy for Powys'.

This strategy will deliver an approach around three themes and looks to deliver and commission services accordingly. These three areas are 'Start Well', 'Live Well' and 'Age Well' and reflect the different stages of each of our lives.

The focus of this approach is based around the principle of doing 'what matters' to the individual and ensuring this is delivered as early as possible. It wants to avoid people repeating their situation and strives to deliver an approach where there is 'no wrong front door'.

To deliver on these objectives, they have developed a model of care which is detailed below;



As detailed in the diagram, the model advocates community hubs to deliver services which is in line with the locality approach being developed through Supporting People.

If we are to successfully prevent homelessness we need to consider how we link in with this approach and work with partners commissioned through this model to ensure it links with the support being delivered both by Supporting People services and any staff within housing working on the prevention of homelessness.

As part of this approach, the Powys Association of Voluntary Agencies (PAVO) is delivering the 'Community Health and Wellbeing Coordination Service' and employs 'Community Connectors' with aim of working "with the individuals referred to it to identify their requirements and then supports them to access the community services or activities that they feel are right for them and seeks to provide this information on first contact with the individual using a "right first time" approach".

These staff will work with people who are at threat of homelessness and processes need to be in place to ensure that they are able to connect as easily as possible with prevention of homelessness services. By developing the locality approach through Supporting People, the community connectors will be able access the support necessary to prevent homelessness.

To discuss the effectiveness of partnership working currently, and how the 'locality' approach is being embedded, a meeting was organised through PAVO to consider how the voluntary sector is currently operating and the role they could potentially play in the prevention of homelessness. The meeting included representatives from food banks, a street pastor, PAVO staff and trustees.

The following key areas for consideration formed part of the discussion;

- **Accessing advice and support to prevent homelessness**

Agencies felt that they did not have enough knowledge of how to access services for those who are homeless or threatened with it. Concerns were also raised about what knowledge households may have, especially those who might be arriving in the County with no home.

They were positive about the potential development of a web-based approach to allow households to record their housing needs, although they did raise the importance of the security / safeguarding implications and ensuring that those potentially fleeing violent situations were not put at risk.

They welcomed a joint approach and would be positive about supporting households to complete their housing needs electronically. They emphasised the important role voluntary sector agencies must play in advising people and how the Council is not always seen as 'approachable' by the people they support.

In relation to the developing role of 'Community Connectors' they cited the development of 'Integrated Team' meetings happening in each locality based around

the purpose of the connectors and the importance of housing and housing support agencies playing a full part in these meetings and the actions agreed.

- **Support for those with the most complex needs**

The agencies had all experienced cases which were complex and, in their view, the current 'system' had to some degree failed them. They could identify the need for a service to support this group, but with the proviso that any commissioning process looked very closely at existing services and how they could play a full part, rather than a brand-new service simply being parachuted from on high.

- **Current Council Approach**

Several issues were raised about the current Council approach. These included the decisions to develop services 'in-house' when they didn't think this was always appropriate; the role of those undertaking the homelessness assessment and how neutral they were, i.e. that they maybe working in the interests of the Council housing section, rather than the person in need.

They would welcome far greater partnership approach to homelessness and how housing and related agencies can be linked to locality teams and services, such as foodbanks, in order to prevent homelessness early needs to be explored.

### **3.5 Children & Young People's Partnership / Young People**

Developments in commissioning and delivering services for children and young people also reflect the focus on prevention. The Powys Children and Young People's Partnership has been the key driver in developing a programme of 'Prevention and Early Intervention.

The key components of this programme are as follows;

- Locality Based Service Networks
- Whole system approach across the Continuum of Need
- Integrated commissioning strategies and delivery
- A co-ordinated 'Everybody's Business approach to Early Intervention and Prevention and delivering a Team Around the Family (TAF) approach
- Progressive Universalism and building community capacity – 'Community Focused Services'
- Consistent, evidence-based approaches to delivery and intervention
- Multi-agency workforce training and development
- A Single Point of contact (PPD) - 'Front Door'

These key components are consistent with the approaches discussed in this document. Once again, there is an emphasis on a locality-based approach which mirrors the proposed approach in Supporting People services.

The key focus in developing a relationship with these services is to prevent youth homelessness. At present the Youth Intervention Service is a jointly commissioned service funded by Children's Services and Supporting People and works with young people, primarily to support them into education, training or employment; but has found they are increasingly working with young people with housing issues. In discussions with the senior officer responsible it became apparent that they were delivering a valuable service in supporting young people through the homelessness system when necessary, linking into relevant support and helping them to find the right accommodation to move on in their lives.

This 'signposting' role is similar to that offered by the community connectors, (although the work with the young person is more intensive) and shows the potential for this partnership approach to work successfully to prevent homelessness.

### **3.6 The introduction of Universal Credit**

Universal Credit is a benefit being introduced across the UK to replace 6 existing means tested benefits. It is already in place in Powys for claimants who have less complex claims but will be going live for all new claimants, and anyone who experiences a change of circumstance, from Oct 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

This new benefit will include housing costs and will be paid directly to the individual. Claims will need to be made online and then the claimant is invited to their local Job Centre Plus.

There are significant concerns that the introduction of the benefit will lead to an increase in housing problems, rent arrears and homelessness. The fears centre around the benefit being paid direct to the claimant, rather than directly to the landlord and the claimant then not passing on the rent element.

There are a variety of agencies working in Powys to support individuals with the transition on to the new benefit. Powys Council provides a Personal Budgeting Service, as well as funding the Money Advice Service.

In discussions with the Partnership Manager for the Department of Work & Pensions the importance of ensuring any advice was timely for new claimants and could be accessed easily as soon as the claimant is moved on to the new payment system.

There was still some misunderstanding on how landlords will be informed if a tenant is moved over to Universal Credit. For example, if a tenant who has been suffering from mental ill health has recovered and is declared fit to work; from October 10<sup>th</sup> this person will be considered to have had a change of circumstance and will be moved on to Universal Credit.

Will the social or private landlord be informed of this and can support be accessed to help establish rent payments, etc. once Universal Credit is received?

In discussions with the Partnership Manager it was agreed that the DWP would welcome advice agencies to 'sit in' for perhaps one morning per week, so people moving over to the new benefit can access advice and early. This might be

something worth experimenting with, especially if any staff are able to work remotely within the Job Centre.

### **3.7 Mental Ill Health & Health**

As part of the review discussions took place with the Health Board's operational lead for occupational therapy across the County. She has been asked to take a lead on homelessness.

The Health Board recognise the importance people's housing can have on an individual's health and can identify how insecure housing situations can both be caused by mental ill health or exacerbate it.

They have experienced difficulties in finding accommodation for people with mental ill health and highlighted the importance of allowing people to remain in the area where their support mechanisms exist. This can be particularly difficult in some areas of the County.

The Health Board is aware of those who have multiple issues in relation to mental ill health, substance misuse and offending behaviour and how difficult it can be for these people to access services. If homelessness occurs too they concede that this only adds to the issues and households can often 'fall through gaps' and find it very difficult to engage.

- **Linking with 'Health & Care Strategy for Powys'**

Discussions took place on the development of the 'prevention hubs' and locality approach being developed as part of the 'Health & Care Strategy for Powys'. The Health Board can identify the synergies between the approach being taken in relation to the remodelling of Supporting People services and highlight the need to explore how GP surgeries can become engaged with the prevention of homelessness agenda.

To develop this, they highlight the need for health professionals to develop a greater awareness of homelessness in Powys, as well as information on how and where to access advice and support.

- **Working with Health to support those with most complex needs**

There was a positive response to the possibility of an intensive outreach and support service being developed. It was highlighted how such a service could work in partnership with existing 'crisis' teams who are currently based in the north and south of the county.

The Health Board would be keen in being involved in the commissioning of such a service and felt it was important to establish and commission something new, rather than try and 'add on' to existing services.

Any commissioning process needs to explore how any service can complement and work in partnership both with the crisis teams and the potential of working closely with primary care services.

In summary, the Health Board are very positive in relation to developing more of a partnership approach to meeting the needs of homeless people and especially those who are also struggling with mental ill health. They would like to be involved in implementing the strategy and play a role in the commissioning of any new service for those with the most complex needs.

### **3.8 Domestic Abuse**

The authority has recently undertaken an extensive review of its domestic abuse service. The findings of this review are currently being taken forward, so it was agreed that domestic abuse services would not be part of the remit of this review as it could lead to complications.

### **Part 4 – Priorities to Consider**

- **The Development of an IT solution to record and manage homelessness applications**

As discussed, to record and receive homelessness applications other local authorities in Wales have developed IT systems. This not only allows better recording of the statistics but would allow cases to be allocated more effectively.

The Abris system which has been adopted in a number of local authorities across Wales allows those who are concerned about their housing situation to record this through a web-based system. Importantly this could be accessed and completed either by the individual or by agencies working with them.

The system generates a plan for individual to take things forward and can be accessed directly by housing staff which will allow them to focus their workload and allocate accordingly. There is also the opportunity to bring in other agencies to support the local authority to meet its housing duties.

- **The development of a partnership approach with SP funded agencies, HMOO's, HPHOO's, prevention hubs and community connectors**

The policy direction within the local authority indicates a strong emphasis on early intervention and prevention. To prevent homelessness, the authority should consider how it models services to reflect this.

The re-tendering of Supporting People services to deliver support on a locality basis reflects developments in Health and Social Services, as well as the Children and Young People's Partnership. There are undoubtedly opportunities for housing / homelessness to model their services in light of this and develop a partnership with the 'Supporting People' locality teams and the broader Health & Social Care agencies, so they are assisting households to prevent homelessness together.

The authority should explore how it develops mediation and financial advice services, so they are available early and within each locality. Through utilising the IT

system discussed above the allocation of this support could be achieved more effectively. Again, it is important these services are placed so that they can be accessed by households before any homelessness duties are triggered, rather than after they've been assessed.

The development of 'prevention hubs' and community connectors on a locality basis also offer opportunities for closer partnership working and there is scope to engage and educate staff working in these roles so they can spot issues early and refer accordingly. Once again, by utilising a new IT system and allowing the opportunity for other agencies to work with households to complete and record issues early via a web-based system may allow households to be supported before duties are triggered.

The role of the HMOOs also needs to be considered. How can they play a full part in this partnership? As housing officers, they have a deep understanding of their local 'patch' and the people living there. This local intelligence should not be underestimated and the development of close working relationships with the support service / worker who will be working alongside them. With the HMOO being responsible for both housing management and homelessness it is imperative they are taking a full role in liaising with support agencies across their patch and effectively aiming to reduce their homelessness caseload.

As services are developed, tendered and modelled the higher level of demand for homelessness assistance in the North of the county should be considered and how resources are deployed should be explored.

The homelessness review undertaken in Carmarthenshire explored the homelessness presentations coming from each ward within the county. This data will now be used to focus support services in the areas which are creating the highest proportion of duties, so that it can act early with the aim of 'switching off' demand on those officers fulfilling homelessness duties.

Unfortunately, this data was difficult to access in Powys and would need to be extracted manually. This is something which the authority might want to consider doing soon to help model re-tendered support services and ensure that services are in the 'right place at the right time' to prevent homelessness.

- **To reflect the greater demand being placed on the private rented sector, allocate extra resources accordingly**

With the Housing (Wales) Act allowing local authorities to discharge their homelessness duties in the private rented sector, the pressures on this sector have increased.

However, not only is the sector being used more to house vulnerable people there are also additional pressures mounting on private landlords with the development of the national registration / licensing scheme and additional welfare reforms. With these additional pressures, landlords require further support.

The authority should consider developing its private rented sector housing service and reflect upon increasing its resources in this area. Any additional resources

should focus on supporting landlords and link with the locality teams to ensure the appropriate support services are available for tenants.

By establishing the post to explore and develop the 'social lettings agency' this will be tackled, but any development needs to ensure the balance between recruiting landlords and ensuring that the resources are available to adequately support those recruited.

- **Develop intensive and assertive support services for those most difficult to house**

Feedback from HMOOs and other stakeholders suggests that despite the new duties and the requirement to do more assist households, there remain a number who prove to be very difficult to house. This not only leads to far greater demands on housing services, but a wide variety of different services too.

The introduction of the Homelessness Prevention and Housing Options Officers offer the opportunity for far more detailed casework with this group. However, if solutions are to prove to be long term there need to be the appropriate support services in place to support households to retain accommodation which is accessed.

Any support service developed needs reflect how difficult this group can be to engage and explore how a model of support can be developed to ensure it reflects this and offers assertive / outreach services which don't easily give up on the household and retain them as part of any service in the long term.

As part of this development explore the possibility of developing a 'Housing First' approach in partnership with Housing Associations or private landlords and explore how a service could work in partnership with similar services developed in Ceredigion.

In Neath Port Talbot, the Community Safety Team and South Wales Police have established a Street Vulnerable Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference. This reflects processes which have been used for those suffering domestic abuse and applies it to those people within the County Borough who are creating the highest demand on services, rough sleepers, etc.

Such an approach is worth exploring in Powys. It ensures all agencies are engaged, as all relevant agencies attend monthly meetings. Each person who needs support is discussed at the meeting on a case by case basis, and possible solutions / support options are considered and acted upon.

By establishing such a meeting in Powys it could be utilised as a vehicle to adopt a 'Housing First' model and ensure all relevant agencies are engaged.

- **Explore the co-location of staff within Job Centre Plus to assist households through the transition on to Universal Credit**

The new way of allocating benefits through Universal Credit has led to significant concerns in relation to its impact on levels of homelessness, especially as rent

payments will form part of the benefit going directly to the tenant, rather than the landlord.

To ensure that those moving on to Universal Credit are supported at an early stage the authority should explore the possibility of co-locating staff within Job Centre Plus Centres so that the right support can be accessed / landlords can be notified / rent payments can be arranged.