



**Merthyr Tydfil County Borough  
Council  
Housing Support Programme  
Statement of Need**

January 2022



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## Introduction

The Statement of Need uses the findings of the Needs Assessment to identify the key issues for the Housing Support Programme Strategy and its strategic objectives.

## Overview of Merthyr Tydfil

Covering 55 square miles, Merthyr Tydfil is the smallest Unitary Authority in Wales. The main population centre is concentrated in Merthyr Tydfil itself but the area also contains a number of villages including Troedyrhiw, Aberfan, Bedlinog and Treharris. The total population of Merthyr Tydfil is expected to grow modestly between today and 2040, mainly due to migration, but the proportion of people over 65 years and 80 years is expected to grow significantly.

Austerity measures and welfare reforms have had a greater negative impact in Merthyr Tydfil than in many other areas in Wales and it has a number of areas have been identified as having significant levels of housing deprivation such as Merthyr Tydfil Town, Penydarren, Merthyr Vale and Gurnos. Merthyr Tydfil features some of the most deprived areas in Wales. There is a greater concentration of deprivation in the north of the local authority particularly in the areas surrounding Merthyr Tydfil such as Penydarren, Gurnos and Gellideg in Cyfarthfa. Although levels of deprivation are lower in the south of the local authority, there is a significant concentration of deprivation in Merthyr Vale which is one of two areas of “deep-rooted deprivation” in Merthyr Tydfil, along with Penydarren.

## Homelessness

Changes made to homelessness legislation as a result of the COVID19 pandemic, placed a statutory duty on the Council to provide temporary accommodation for all individuals/households in ‘priority need’ if they are believed to be homeless, until affordable permanent accommodation can be secured. This resulted in a significant increase in the amount of homelessness presentations from March 2020.

Welsh Government legislation and policy summarised in the Needs Assessment sets out clearly the importance of preventing homelessness wherever possible.

This is particularly important in Merthyr Tydfil where there are unique challenges in developing and building new homes. The Needs Assessment shows that demand for accommodation is significantly higher than the supply available through home ownership, private renting and social housing. The Housing Solutions Team invariably has to rely upon local bed & breakfast and guest houses, to provide this temporary accommodation (TA).

Homelessness and Housing Support Grant (HSG) services have a focus on prevention, however feedback from stakeholders described the recent surge in need has meant they have had to focus support on crisis management. Stakeholders identified the need to re-focus on prevention, offering support sooner to prevent homelessness. They were keen to work flexibly together to develop a one stop shop in the borough.

## Mental Health, Substance Misuse and Co-occurrence

The Population Assessment highlights that Merthyr Tydfil and Cwm Taf more widely has the highest

rates of mental illness and poor well-being in Wales.

Referrals to HSG services record primary, secondary and tertiary needs. Mental health was the second highest primary need and was also the highest incidence in secondary needs. Merthyr Tydfil has amongst the highest reported incidences of substance misuse, mental illness and poor well-being in Wales. Substance misuse commonly co-occurs with mental health issues in people who are referred to HSG services.

The Population Assessment highlighted significant unmet housing needs for adults with mental health issues. Housing problems are frequently given as a reason for a person being admitted or re-admitted to inpatient mental health care. People with mental illness are far more likely to live in rented accommodation and their mental ill-health is often given as a major reason for tenancy breakdown.

The Council has previously seen a year on year increase in HSG mental health referrals however, it is anticipated that this will rise significantly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders highlighted the increased levels of mental health complexity and risk referred into support services since the pandemic.

The region has the highest rates of both drug misuse deaths and alcohol related deaths in Wales. Referrals to HSG services with Substance Misuse as the primary need are low, however stakeholder feedback indicates that it emerges as a need for a significant number of referrals once support commences.

Stakeholder engagement undertaken for this report confirmed that it is challenging to engage NHS substance misuse services, particularly services like rehabilitation and detox. HSG providers described having to try to manage these issues through their support.

Stakeholders highlighted the challenge in meeting the needs of people who do not meet eligibility for health or social care services, but their needs are higher than HSG services are designed to meet.

There are challenges with accessing mental health services both for those with high needs and those whose needs do not meet eligibility criteria.

Research undertaken highlights significant challenges in accessing NHS services for mental health and substance misuse.

The terms 'co-occurrence' or 'dual diagnosis' usually refers to the co-occurrence of a mental illness alongside substance misuse. The relationship between mental illness and substance misuse is complex and can change over time.

Compared to people with a mental health problem alone, those with substance misuse and mental health problems are:

- likely to experience more severe mental health problems
- be at increased risk of suicide
- experience unstable housing
- have financial difficulties
- be less likely to engage with treatment interventions
- are more likely to fall through the gap between services

Stakeholders confirmed it is particularly challenging for support services to get NHS mental health and substance misuse treatment services involved.

A new specialist regional service is now in place, but it is too early to fully evaluate.

### Young People

Young people aged between 16 and 25 make up a significant proportion of the people presenting to the councils as homeless, often leaving home due to family breakdown. They are also the group of people that receive the fourth highest number of referrals for HSG funded support.

All councils have recently been tasked by Welsh Government to examine their corporate parenting response in relation to care experienced children and young people (CYP) and their future accommodation needs.

Young people need dedicated services that offer appropriate support to build skills to move on to their own permanent accommodation.

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

The number of women presenting as homeless due to violence at home is also one of the highest number of presentations each year. It is the third highest lead need for referral to HSG support services.

The Council provides seven units of refuge accommodation as well as two dispersed units. Floating Support (55 units) is available as well as the provision of target hardening equipment to enable women to remain in their own homes.

Stakeholder feedback indicates the refuge provision receives referrals for people with high needs and high levels of risk, indicating more analysis of VAWDASV services is needed.

### Older people

The number of people aged 65 and over who will struggle to care for themselves safely or to perform routine domestic tasks will increase by 34% increase in Merthyr by 2040. It is often the lack of ability or perception of a lack of ability to do these tasks that prompts contact with social services.

There will also be a 61% increase in people over 65 who have dementia in Merthyr by 2040 as well as a 46% increase in falls of those over 75 years in the same period. One in three people end up leaving their own home and moving to long term care following a fall.

## Accommodation

Merthyr Tydfil has a significantly higher proportion of older housing stock than elsewhere in Wales, which manifests itself in a high rate of unfitness, particularly amongst terraced housing. There is a substantial need for one and two bed properties in the Borough. The highest need for these is in the Town, Dowlais, Gurnos, Cyfarthfa and Penydarren wards.

Forty per-cent of the demand for one bed accommodation comes from applicants under 35. This is

putting pressure on the provision of one bed accommodation, as there is a significant shortfall of one bedroom accommodation in the borough.

### Temporary accommodation

Changes made to homelessness legislation as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, places a statutory duty on the Council to provide temporary accommodation for all individuals/households in 'priority need' if they are believed to be homeless, until affordable permanent accommodation can be secured. This has resulted in a significant increase in the amount of homelessness presentations since March 2020.

The Housing Solutions Team invariably has to rely upon local bed & breakfast and guest houses, to provide this temporary accommodation (TA).

As of 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021, there were 157 people in TA. An analysis of their support needs indicated approximately a third had high or intensive needs.

Due to a lack of affordable single person accommodation in the Borough, move on accommodation is extremely limited and there is insufficient RSL stock available to meet the current demand. It is envisaged that many people will remain in B&B and other TA for quite some time until permanent accommodation can be sourced. In 2020/21, 58 units of single person accommodation became available across all 4 RSL's in Merthyr Tydfil.

Services are also seeing changes in service user expectations and behaviour, with an increased sense of entitlement to TA. Many seem to be deliberately breaking down supported accommodation placements in the hope of being offered alternative TA in B&B where there is likely to be less scrutiny compared to 24/7 supported accommodation projects.

### Private Rented Sector

The use of accommodation provided by private landlords has been a vital part of providing accommodation to prevent homelessness or to provide move on from temporary accommodation. The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Team provides housing benefit entitlement for tenants renting private-sector accommodation in Wales, paid to those who need it to rent a safe place to live. In 2016, the government announced a complete freeze on LHA rates which has meant that many households have struggled to make up the shortfall between their rent and Local Housing Allowance.

The cost of private renting is changing rapidly, out of pace with nationally verified information. However, indicative local rents were found to be over £200 per calendar month (pcm) for one bedroom accommodation and almost £250 over pcm for two bedroom accommodation.

Fewer private landlords are willing to accept people via the Council as there is high demand, driving up prices and number of people applying for each vacancy, landlords are tending to favour people using private income rather than LHA.

### Housing First and Rapid Rehousing

The Council has commissioned a small number of units of rapid rehousing via the Housing First model. Due to the challenges finding accommodation in Merthyr Tydfil this approach is under review.

### Building new homes

There is an affordable housing crisis in Merthyr. The Council has in place a three year development programme which is in line with Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant Programme and is on course to deliver 170 units of accommodation over the next three years, of which 104 are one bedroom accommodation - these units consist of developments that are currently 'live on-site' and those that are yet to start but are scheduled to be completed by March 2024.

The Council expect to start developments towards the end of 2022/23 and during 2023/4 which will deliver a further 130 units affordable housing, ready for occupancy after 2023/4.

However, if the requirement to be in 'priority need' for housing remains suspended as it has during the pandemic, the demand for move on and permanent housing will increase

### Support Services

There are some groups of people that feature significantly within those presenting as homeless or being referred for HSG funded support services. Two key groups are single people aged 25 and over and ex-offenders being released from prison. Within these groups are a wide range of needs, many that prior to changes made to homelessness legislation as a result of the COVID19 pandemic, may not have been eligible for a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation. However many of these people have a range of complex needs such mental health, substance misuse and the two co-occurring.

Supported accommodation and floating support have seen an increase in the complexity of needs and level of risk in the people that are being referred since March 2020. This means that support services need to evaluate the impact COVID-19 has had on them and the type of service they need to deliver.

Stakeholder feedback raised concerns around the challenge of having year on year funding arrangements, which prevented them from employing staff permanently leading to high turnover and disruption for clients. Concerns were also raised about the requirements of HSG contracts in what can be delivered and how.

It was also raised that services are focussed on crisis management since the pandemic, and there is a need to develop more preventative approaches.

There is a need to explore with support providers how to co-design services that better meet people's needs, as well as allow flexibility to develop services that increase capacity to prevent homelessness, such as a one stop shop for advice.

### Multiagency working

A range of assessments and analysis from the Needs Assessment confirm that where several agencies are involved, information sharing arrangements between partners are essential to optimise the care for individuals.

Research also identifies the challenges people can have accessing NHS services such mental health and substance misuse services.

There are high numbers of ex-offenders referred into housing and support, close partnership working with Probation is essential.

Agencies were frequently complimentary about the support the Council provides to people that are presenting as homeless. However, RSLs and support providers felt there the partnership working with Health, Probation and Education needed a significant focus to improve multiagency response for individuals and strategically across the borough and region.

Concerns were also raised about the amount and quality of information shared about people by these agencies meaning people have to repeat their story multiple times. Data collection across agencies needs to be improved, and aligned with agreed national frameworks to better inform future service planning.