

# North Wales Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group

ANNUAL STATEMENT

APRIL 2021 – APRIL 2022

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Welcome to the North Wales Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group's (RHSCG) Annual Statement outlining our objectives for the next twelve months. This statement addresses the progression made against 2020-21's annual work plan for the RHSCG.

The North Wales RHSCG was set up in September 2020, it has replaced the former Regional Collaborative Committee (RCC) following Welsh Government's announcement in October 2020 to combine the Supporting People grant, Homeless Prevention grant and Rent Smart Wales grant into one funding pot; the Housing Support Grant. The former RCC for North Wales overlooked the Supporting People grant. However, a new grant meant a new grant delivery guidance and we therefore now have a new regional group; the RHSCG which overlooks the Housing Support Grant across the six local authorities.

Here is a summary of the role of the RHSCG, where you can find the Housing Support Grant Guidance and what the Housing Support Grant is about, and a breakdown of the grant for each local authority in North Wales:

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### *What is a RHSCG?*

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The Housing Support Grant Guidance states; the role of the RHSCG (Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group) is to provide a forum for collaborative working. Local authorities are expected to demonstrate how they have engaged with the RHSCG for their region. The guidance outlines regional working as:

- Development of specialist services for which there is not a critical mass locally
- Development of regional services where justified by economies of scale
- Delivery of improvements to be achieved by collaboration
- Collaboration with other public services.

Annually each RHSCG across Wales is expected to submit an annual statement outlining their objectives.

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### *Where can I find the Guidance for the HSG?*

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The Housing Support Grant Guidance, first published in February 2020 and recently updated in April 2021 can be found by clicking on this link:

<https://gov.wales/housing-support-grant-practice-guidance>

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### *What is HSG?*

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HSG (Housing Support Grant) is an amalgamation of three existing grants; Supporting People Programme, Homeless Prevention Grant and Rent Smart Wales Enforcement Grant.

HSG is a grant mechanism which funds part of an overall ‘Housing Support Programme’ that encompasses both the statutory homelessness duty funded through the revenue settlement and the non-statutory housing support preventative services funded through the HSG. Viewing both as a whole allows Wales to take a systematic approach to reducing homelessness and the impact of homelessness and unstable housing.

HSG is an early intervention grant programme to support activity, which prevents people from becoming homeless, stabilises their housing situation, or helps potentially homeless people to find and keep accommodation.

HSG supports vulnerable people to address the, sometimes, multiple, problems they face, such as debt, employment, tenancy management, substance misuse, violent against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and mental health issues.

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*The North Wales HSG allocation*

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The Housing Support Grant for Wales was allocated an additional 40million pounds for the financial year 2021-22, following a bid by officials in Welsh Government. This increase to the 2021-22 HSG budget was in recognition of the investment that is needed to end homelessness, with the additional funding coming from the Welsh Government’s core budget, rather than from a Covid related budget. The message from Welsh Government is to consider the increase in grant funding to be the new baseline for the HSG going forward, therefore local authorities can forward plan with a degree of certainty.

As the table below shows there has been a significant increase to each local authority’s allocation for the Housing Support Grant:

Local Authority	HSG Allocation for this year 2021-22	HSG Allocation <b>previous year</b> 2020-21
Anglesey	£3,571,720.50	£2,714,998
Gwynedd	£6,802,616.45	£5,170,923
Conwy	£8,645,095.79	£6,571,460
Denbighshire	£7,356,535.02	£5,591,976
Flintshire	£7,828,610.00	£5,950,818
Wrexham	£6,721,499.09	£5,109,262
North Wales	<b>£40,926,076.85</b>	£31,109,437

It is important the RHSCG continues to keep this high on its agenda and wider related networks, the next heading gives background information to this matter to explain why it is a high risk to the Housing Support Grant in North Wales.

**Redistribution:**

The original formula was developed back in 2003 when the Supporting People programme was introduced (prior to it being one combined grant) and local authorities were asked to “maximise the pot” based on Housing Benefit to depict the need for their authority. All 22 local authorities in Wales were then allocated their grant, the amounts differed considerably; but reflected the efforts made by authorities to reflect their current need at that time when they were asked to do so by Welsh Government.

Over the years this has brought tension to the Supporting People programme; why some authorities receive more than others, and was covered in the Aylward Review of the Supporting People programme (now part of the wider grant – Housing Support Grant) when it was reviewed back in 2012 by Professor Aylward.

This review in 2012 subsequently introduced a new funding formula to distribute funds more fairly; however this formula would have a detrimental effect on services for the Local Authorities who would be set to lose a significant amount of funding. The formula was not implemented by Welsh Government. In 2019, Welsh Government revisited the Redistribution agenda and commissioned an external contractor (ALMA Economics) to review the Aylward formula and as a result a new funding formula was proposed in March 2020.

The new funding formula if approved during the Ministers term would result in the following changes to authority’s allocation:

Local Authority	HSG Allocation for 2021-22	% increase / decrease proposed in March 2020	What this % will look like to the allocation
Anglesey	£3,571,720.50	Plus 6.2%	£3,793,167.17
Gwynedd	£6,802,616.45	Down 9.6%	£6,149,565.27
Conwy	£8,645,095.79	Down 21.2%	£6,812,335.49
Denbighshire	£7,356,535.02	Down 15.8%	£6,194,202.49
Flintshire	£7,828,610.00	Down 4.3%	£7,491,980.00
Wrexham	£6,721,499.09	Down 5.5%	£6,351,816.65
North Wales	<b>£40,926,076.85</b>		£36,793,067.07 <b>Reduction of £4,133,009.78</b> (includes Anglesey’s increase)

It took a pandemic to show the true worth and value of housing related support for the grant to be recognised and increased. Whilst the additional funding is much needed and welcoming, subsequently, the looming threat of redistribution at a time where we still don't know the true impact of this pandemic is concerning for authorities.

Presentations to authorities are not reducing, caseloads are still extremely high, and when an authority moves someone on from temporary or emergency accommodation that slot is as quickly filled as it is emptied. Some authorities have no more temporary accommodation available, this pressure combined to the impending pressure of the aftermath of the pandemic where it is expected authorities will have further presentations from job loss / debt increase from the pandemic resulting in loss of home, family breakdown, poor mental health, pressure in relationships; domestic violence and abuse, these people / families will present at crisis point.

The message is simple; authorities and providers are at breaking point, there is scarce, limited accommodation available, if our grants are considerably cut, authorities will have to decommission some providers and projects and the duty to accommodate everyone just will not be able to be met on reduced budgets, as it is strained now.

Unfortunately this bleak message must be kept high on our agenda.

### The North Wales RHSCG

Like all new groups formed in 2020, our meetings have had to be virtual. Welsh Government advised to put the work of the RHSCG on hold in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and we reconvened in September 2020.

Bringing a host of new members around a virtual table, has had its challenges we have not had the opportunity to network as such, which can hinder participation. Online meetings have a tendency to be more structured, they are also fast paced (not on purpose) virtual platforms don't hold silence well to give people time to reflect.

This is still new to us all, and we need to find our feet with the virtual platforms to ensure we do have transparency at meetings, allow for spontaneity and try and ensure we have plenty of interaction on agenda items moving forward. This will be prioritised going forward at the RHSCG, it will be a priority of ours to ensure we can build on networking and interaction virtually. Moving ahead; scrutinising spend plans virtually will be one of our challenges.

Nonetheless, virtual meetings has meant great attendance. North Wales is a large region and time spent travelling for a morning meeting has always been problematic, still a benefit to this platform has meant good attendance.

### Our Achievements to date

Last year we agreed our objectives would be:

1. Adopt the North Wales Regional Homelessness Strategy group as a sub group off the RHSCG.
2. Redistribution – ensure all members are aware of the issue that faces the Housing Support Grant
3. Continue all former Regional Collaborative Committee service user documents - These include the Our People's Stories; a document updated annually showcasing six case studies across the

region and the cost of the support against the cost saved to other statutory services. Continue with the online supporting people service user feedback questionnaire, regular analysis reports are produced which highlight the importance of housing related support services.

4. Explore the potential for a Domestic Abuse refuge to accept dual diagnosis (Substance misuse and mental health)
5. Streamline the registered sex offender cases and MAPPA cases dynamic
6. Regional website
7. Collaboration with other regional bodies / partnerships

The following table outlines progression made against each priority area listed above.

1	Regional Homelessness Strategy	<p>The Regional Homelessness Strategy now reports to the RHSCG. Laura Patterson Ltd has been commissioned by the region to give us findings on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic having learnt lessons and change the way we work.</li> <li>2. To use homeless data / information beyond the statistics to better understand the need and project future demand on services.</li> <li>3. To develop a work stream on ending evictions into homelessness.</li> </ol>
2	Redistribution	<p>All members at an RHSCG meeting have received a summary paper of the timeline of redistribution to date. This has since been updated to reflect the uplift in the Housing Support Grant allocations as redistribution current proposal for percentage cuts will still apply to the new allocation if approved by the next assembly.</p> <p>The RHSCG has developed a communication plan for when Redistribution is next discussed at large by Welsh Government.</p>
3	Service User Voices	<p>The Our People's Stories has again been updated, a new year of case studies and cost benefit analysis against the cost prevented to statutory services.</p> <p>A years' worth of data from the online service user feedback questionnaire has been analysed and pulled into a document showing the words of the service users, where they would be without the service, and how the services have changed their lives.</p> <p>Both documents will continue to be updated annually at the RHSCG.</p>
4	Dual Diagnosis refuge	<p>This will be explored in this year's annual statement work plan.</p> <p>Discussions have commenced with the VAWDASV Commissioning Group.</p>
5	MAPPA	<p>Having explored this priority area further it is apparent work on this has previously been achieved outside of the RHSCG by the North Wales Resettlement Officers. A reciprocal with the appropriate forms and procedures has been agreed.</p>

6	Website	<p>The outcome was to not create a North Wales Housing Support Grant or RHSCG website at this time. Factoring reasons, the cost of running a website in a time of a pandemic; money needs to go directly to supporting our communities.</p> <p>Other factors; numbers visiting the site, it was predicted the traffic could be low for a RHSCG website, communities incline to go directly to the local point of call first. Agreed to continue using Conwy's website to host minutes of the RHSCG. If traffic to current website increases this will be revisited.</p>
7	Collaboration	<p>Regional Partnership Board links were the priority when setting up the RHSCG. The Local authority housing rep on the RPB is the vice chair on the RHSCG. The Regional Development Coordinator attends the RPB Relationship Managers meetings. Annually the RHSCG presents this statement and progress made. Opportunities to jointly commission will present themselves at either meetings, or relationship managers meetings.</p>

A review of the RHSCG has also been completed and shared with the RHSCG members. Its content will help shape future RHSCG meetings.

### Collaboration with other Partnerships

Continuing on from the links currently formed with the RPB, for regional working to be successful, the RHSCG will need to ensure links are made where a housing support is an element of another regional agenda. We have listed boards with a known housing cross over below.

The Housing Support Grant guidance states “RPBs provide the mechanism through which collaborative working between Health, Social and Housing can be developed. They are therefore the right mechanism for RHSCGs to build a close working relationship”. This is also mirrored in part 9 of the updated guidance for the RPBs where it states ‘Sub group arrangements should also include groups to focus on housing and accommodation led solutions to health and social care’. Vulnerability



The next twelve months we will focus on committing to enhance and explore potential collaboration with the above mentioned boards and to get the name of the RHSCG more widely out there in North Wales and with the goal to explore commissioning potentials / regionally or sub-regional projects.



## Objectives for 2021-22

The Covid-19 pandemic has massively impacted on homelessness, the way local authorities and service providers have had to respond to the needs of those experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless has been immense.

The reaction to the pandemic is currently being captured by the commissioned consultant at the Regional Homelessness Strategy group; whom is interviewing local authority staff, providers, and service users receiving housing related support. The RHSCG will have a report from the group detailing lessons learnt that have emerged from the pandemic and ways we can change the way we work going forward.

At the RHSCG we will continue the discussion; what will happen to the people that have been placed in temporary accommodation as restrictions start to ease and how will North Wales respond to this? The Regional Homelessness Strategy group is also looking at how we use homeless data / information beyond the statistics to better understand the need and project future demand on services. The RHSCG will consider how we regionally monitor the current issues faced by Covid-19 but also the aftermath and what plans we can have in place to the increasing presentations to homeless services.

We have raised with the North Wales Regional Collaboration Group responding to Covid-19 that the lack of housing available is a huge issue and have addressed that to the board as a risk. Phase 2 funding made available from Welsh Government during the pandemic has allowed for some additional units via capital spend to be purchased. The RHSCG will continue to have an oversight of development of Phase 2 money.

Whilst this is a paper to outline our objectives for the next twelve months, the RHSCG would like to address the remarkable efforts made by all providers and local authorities during the pandemic to get everyone off the street and housed. This was a mammoth task; and North Wales did it, innovative temporary housing solutions were sourced; bunkabins / Kabins, bed and breakfasts, university accommodation, hotels were obtained; and now staff continue to be under pressure to move people on to more suitable accommodation in a region where housing is so limited.

The RHSCG will continue discussions on Rapid Rehousing, Housing First; however the RHSCG will be the voice to Welsh Government from North Wales that these initiatives to be successful need more capital funding available for the growth of stock available to housing support.

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For the next twelve months, the RHSCG has identified regional priorities for its work plan. Within the HSG guidance regional working is categorised as:

- Cat 1) Development of specialist services for which there is not a critical mass locally
- Cat 2) Development of regional services where justified by economies of scale
- Cat 3) Delivery of improvements to be achieved by collaboration
- Cat 4) Collaboration with other public services.

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*What are the RHSCG regional priority areas for 2021-22?*

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**Cat 1: Development of specialist services for which there is not a critical mass locally.**

Our North Wales service user feedback questionnaire and the local authority HSG housing needs assessment data will highlight gaps in service provision. Priorities under this category to be progressed by the RHSCG for 2021/22 are:

- Regional LGBTQ+ training
- LGBTQ+ regional project / dispersed unit
- Regional hoarding project
- Explore a regional dispersed unit / refuge for male survivors of domestic abuse

**Cat 2: Development of regional services where justified by economies of scale**

The RHSCG will continue funding the Phase 2 regional project commissioned jointly with the area planning board for the North Wales Collaborative Outreach service.

The RHSCG has also approved to contribute for another year for the jointly commissioned Independent Domestic Violence Advisors with the VAWDASV funding and OPCC. Another years funding has also been committed for target hardening and has increased in some local authorities.

The RHSCG in unison with the VAWDASV commissioning group will explore the potential for a regional dual diagnosis domestic abuse refuge.

**Cat 3: Delivery of improvements to be achieved by collaboration**

The RHSCG will continue to build links where a housing support is an element of another regional agenda and ensure there is collaboration and partnership working at a regional level to deliver improvements to services.

Bespoke training will be explored by the RHSCG for our Housing Support Grant providers, specifically looking at Mental Health First Aid training.

The HSG leads will be exploring for the RHSCG how we can ensure services are operating a psychologically informed environment approach. This is essentially a culture shift we are prioritising to embed trauma informed provision.

The RHSCG will continue to have Rapid Rehousing as a standard agenda item going forward. It is crucial we use this platform to share local authority knowledge in progressing towards Rapid Rehousing Hubs across North Wales.

**Cat 4: Collaboration with other public services.**

The RHSCG will continue to improve links with the RPB and other regional boards / partnerships where there is a housing linkage / agenda. Our Vice Chair Sam Parry, Housing Services Manager for Conwy County Borough Council is the local authority housing representative at the North Wales RPB.

The RHSCG will continue to formalise line of communication related to regional working. The Regional Homelessness Strategy is now a sub group off the RHSCG. We need to make better connections with health and probation at the RHSCG to ensure the housing related agenda has formalised links and a communication pathway to address current issues.

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A detailed work plan will be available at each RHSCG meeting addressing progression against the priorities, listed these are:

- Regional LGBTQ+ Training
- LGBTQ+ Regional Project / Dispersed Unit
- Regional Mental Health First Aid Training
- Regional Hoarding Project
- Regional Dispersed Unit / refuge for Male survivors of domestic abuse
- Explore potential for a regional Dual Diagnosis Domestic Abuse Refuge
- Explore regional opportunity to embed Psychological Trauma Informed approach
- Rapid Rehousing

The RHSCG will also look at assembling a regional 'Off the shelf project register'. Given the increase in HSG funding this year, it is highly likely there could be underspend. The RHSCG could use this opportunity to prioritise other regional priorities that have not proceeded by the end of the financial year.

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For any further information regarding the RHSCG please contact the Regional Development Coordinator, contact details are available in the appendix where the membership of the RHSCG has been shared.

Appendix One – Membership of the RHSCG

RHSCG Membership	Organisation / Service represented	Lead
Local Authority Strategic lead for Housing Support Grant	Anglesey	Elliwllyr
	Gwynedd	Hedd Tomos
	Conwy <b>VICE CHAIR</b>	Sam Parry
	Denbighshire	Ann Lloyd
	Flintshire	Martin Cooil
	Wrexham	Shirley Jones or Tracy Hague
Provider Representatives appointed by Cymorth Cymru (four providers and 2 landlords to equal the local authorities)	North Wales Housing	Lynne Evans (Vice Chair)
	Digartref <b>CHAIR</b>	Wendy Hughes
	Clwyd Alyn	Linda Hughes (landlord rep)
	Hafan Cymru	Emma Wood
	Grwp Cynefin	Gwenan Ellis (landlord rep)
	GISDA	Steffan Williams
Mental Health Representative	BCUHB	Phil Forbes
Probation Representative	North Wales Probation Service	Mark Conlan
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) Representative	OPCC	Diane Jones
Substance Misuse Area Planning Board (APB) Representative	APB	Paul Firth
VAWDASV Board Representative (Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence)	VAWDASV Team	Elwen Roberts
Private Rented Sector Representative	NRLA (National Residential Landlords Association)	Tim Thomas

NORTH WALES REGIONAL HOUSING SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE GROUP

Advisory Members - Housing Support Grant Lead Officers and Lead officers for the RHSCG Sub Group	Anglesey	Arwel Jones
	Gwynedd	Gwyn Roberts
	Conwy	Debbie Lambe
	Denbighshire	Claire Owens
	Flintshire	Lisa Pearson
	Wrexham	Debbie Williams
Regional Development Coordinator (RDC)	North Wales RDC	Rachel Pierce-Jones  <a href="mailto:Rachel.pierce-jones3@conwy.gov.uk">Rachel.pierce-jones3@conwy.gov.uk</a> 01492 574234