

Statement of Need

Introduction

Welsh Government guidance requires local authorities to produce a 'Statement of Need' based on findings from the Needs Assessment undertaken to inform the Housing Support Programme Strategy.

This statement sets out the current and future demand for homeless prevention and housing support services in the county, and how statutory needs identified will be met through the discharge of statutory duties.

Development of the Statement of Need

A comprehensive Needs Assessment is undertaken every 4 years, with a light touch review every 2 years. This uses a variety of data including from homeless presentations, Pathway and Outcomes information and anecdotal evidence on gaps in services. Data has also been obtained via consultation with partners, stakeholders and service users in the production of the Needs Assessment, the Housing Support Programme Strategy and the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.

This Statement of Need is based on the findings of the Needs Assessment and has been informed by the consultation on the draft Housing Support Programme Strategy.

Key Findings

Homelessness and trauma are linked, with a high proportion of people accessing homelessness services having experienced trauma as a child. Social factors such as family breakdown, mental illness, domestic abuse, substance misuse and lack of a support system are all contributory and interlinked to homelessness, as is poverty.

The evidence from the Needs Assessment identifies that Conwy's priorities for the next four years will centre on increasing the provision of services for:

- People with mental health issues, substance misuse issues, offending behaviour and complex needs
- People fleeing domestic abuse or sexual violence
- Young people

'Complex needs' are persistent and interrelated health and/or social care needs, which impact an individual's life and the ability to function in society, and include:

- Mental, psychological, emotional health or physical health needs
- Drug and/or alcohol dependency
- Contact with the criminal justice system
- Experience of domestic violence or abuse

People with complex needs require a higher level of support that is beyond the support that housing-related support services can provide, with support being needed from at least one other service. It is usually as a result of a combination of needs.

Current Demand

The proportion of people making a homeless application has increased, following the 'everyone in' approach and the removal of the requirement to apply the priority need assessment. This has led to a steep increase in Homelessness Prevention Officer caseload numbers, a change in service demand and a high demand for affordable housing.

The noticeable changes in demand include an increase in the number of young people accessing the service, due to relationship breakdown with families, young women who are pregnant/young people with children and young people who are care-leavers.

There has been an increase in the number of people with mental health issues and complex needs, which has had an impact on the time spent supporting individuals. There is a need to strengthen partnership working arrangements with other services in order to ensure that all support needs can be met. There has also been an increase in people experiencing anxiety and depression, with some people struggling to socialise as a result of the pandemic.

There has also been an increase in people with substance misuse issues, offending behaviour and people with complex needs. Multi agency working is required in order to meet these support needs

The use of B and B/hotel accommodation has increased significantly in the last 2 years. Whilst different types of temporary accommodation have been sourced to meet the demand, there have been times when there have been no placements available within the county. Many people are spending extended periods of time in temporary accommodation and there is a need for enhanced support to be available to them, which is able to continue to be available as they move to other types of accommodation

The majority of households in temporary accommodation are in receipt of some kind of benefit and are not able to afford accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS). The situation is more acute for young single people in receipt of benefits, who very often had deductions applied to repay previous loans, leaving them in a position where even social housing, if it were available, would not be affordable.

There is a need for the provision of other forms of temporary accommodation to reduce the use of B and B accommodation, due to concerns about its suitability and cost. Fundamentally, additional affordable housing options are required in order to minimise the use of temporary accommodation.

Future demand

It is anticipated that homelessness will increase in the short term due to the impact of the pandemic and the current economic situation. This will see a continued demand for temporary accommodation, with people living in it for longer periods of time until a greater supply of affordable homes is available.

People living in supported accommodation are also impacted by the shortage of affordable accommodation, resulting in many continuing to live in supported accommodation when they no longer require this higher level of support. Additional move-on accommodation is required to enable them to take the next step at the time that is right for them, freeing up supported accommodation for others that need it.

Additional data about people's needs in order to identify current service gaps is required to inform future service planning and commissioning.

There is a particular need to increase the supply of affordable homes for single people and couples, given the impact of the restriction to benefit at the single room rate only and the very limited social housing stock for this group.

PRS rents are high, with huge shortfalls between them and the Local Housing Allowance rate. This means that the PRS is unaffordable to the majority of household approaching Conwy Housing Solution, and has reduced the options for preventing or relieving homelessness via use of the PRS.

As a result of a variety of factors the PRS in the county may be shrinking, with properties being sold/put to other uses.

Pressures on the housing stock come from the use of properties as holiday and second homes, which can impact on the overall availability of properties for local, residential use and can inflate house prices in an area. However, tourism is a key sector in the local economy.

The current cost of living crisis may see an increase in mortgage repossessions. Some households who have previously been able to afford accommodation in the PRS may face homelessness.

Education, training and employment opportunities would widen housing options for some households.

The number of people with mental health problems is likely to increase. The most common mental illnesses reported are anxiety and depression. Reducing loneliness and isolation would have many benefits for people's health and well-being and reduce the need for statutory services.

There need to be sufficient options for housing victims of domestic violence and abuse who have additional care and support needs that require round the clock staffing, as well as support for family members who witness abuse.

There is a need to prevent people from becoming homeless and for any experience of homelessness to be for as short a period of time as possible. This relies heavily on having a sufficient supply of affordable housing of the

right type to meet demand. It also requires the ability to intervene early and to be able to provide the appropriate support for each individual for as long as they need it. Strong partnership working arrangements are required for this to be successful.

Actions to meet the demand challenges

The following actions have been identified to meet future demand and overcome challenges:

- Implement the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, with the focus on early and primary prevention of homelessness as the priority and a move away from acute spending and tertiary prevention (an intervention approach) via a multi-agency approach
- Review all existing Housing Support Grant (HSG) services to ensure that provision meets the changing needs of service users and consider:
 - commissioning specialist services for people with higher level and/or complex needs, to enable them to be provided with appropriate and timely services
 - the need for lower level, long-term supported accommodation for people who will not be able to maintain their own accommodation
 - the need for specialised supported accommodation to meet the needs of vulnerable young people, LGBTQ+ individuals and parent and baby
 - the need for a wet house, where a harm reduction approach can be taken
- Review the pathway to ensure that there are prompt systems in place in order to engage with those who are leaving the secure estate at the earliest possible opportunity
- Review the cost of supported accommodation to service users and the impact on people who are working
- Maximise the use of Welsh Government funding to improve the quality of temporary accommodation, seeking to move away from B and B/hotels use to increased use of self-contained temporary homes, where temporary accommodation is needed
- Increase the knowledge and awareness of support services, ensuring that they are accessible to everyone that needs them
- Ensure appropriate support is available to people living in B and Bs
- Ensure continuity of support provision when people move from one type of accommodation to another
- Improve data collection in relation to recording people's needs and identifying service gaps
- Review social housing allocations to enable people living in supported housing who are ready to move on to do so. This will free up supported accommodation space for others who would benefit from it

- Promote opportunities for education, training and employment
- Update the Local Authority Prospectus in line with changing needs to ensure that development of the appropriate accommodation is prioritised

Regional services

The HSG Guidance states that the Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group's role is to provide a forum for collaborative working. The guidance outlines regional working as:

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

Current regional working priorities include:

- The Regional Independent Domestic Violence Advisory Service
- The provision of target hardening equipment to support domestic abuse services
- Regional Hoarding Project (from April 2023)
- Working with the national agenda for workforce development
- Strengthening links with Health's Mental Health services
- Consideration of domestic abuse prevention schemes
- Commissioning training relevant to HSG services