

Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022-2026 Review

1 Introduction:

- 1.1 Monmouthshire County Council is required to develop a Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy ('the Strategy') every four years, with a mid-point review every two years, outlining the strategic direction of the Council's housing related support services.
- 1.2 MCC published its Housing Support Programme Strategy in 2022 and thus it is now time to review this strategy, to assess any progress and make any adjustments required in the wake of a changing landscape.
- 1.3 To ensure the HSP remains an appropriate strategy in 2024 and beyond, the needs assessment of homeless households was refreshed with input from partner agencies. The data collected from this exercise, along with charting progress against the Action Plan and acknowledging the emerging and planned changes to homelessness policy and legislation, will measure the relevance of the four priorities previously identified to tackle the current homeless challenges and transform homeless services in Monmouthshire.
- 1.4 At the point of its creation, the Strategy set out a single strategic direction for both homelessness and housing support services in Monmouthshire until 2026. Since its adoption Monmouthshire has created, approved, and begun to implement a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan concurrently.

Purpose of the Strategy

- 1.5 The Strategy continues to guide the work of MCC in respect of homelessness in the medium term and is aligned to MCC's Rapid Rehousing Transition and Action Plan as both are underpinned by the vision to prevent homelessness wherever possible and where we homelessness cannot be prevented it is rare, brief and unrepeatable.
- 1.6 The Strategy seeks to contribute to the Council's commitment to the vision for Monmouthshire to be:
 - A Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced.
 - A Green place to live and work, with reduced carbon emissions, and making a positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency.
 - A Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres, where businesses can grow and develop.
 - A Safe place to live where people have a home and community where they feel secure.
 - A Connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued.
 - A Learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential.
- 1.7 The Strategy fully aligns homelessness and the Council's Housing Support Grant Programme. The on-going review, development and commissioning of the programme is informed by homeless need in the County.

Legislative and Policy Context

- 1.8 This section details any policy or legislation changes that have occurred in the two years following the adoption of the HSP that could impact its relevance and/or delivery.

National Context

1.9 Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016¹

- 1.10 In the two years since the adoption of the HSP the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 (RHA) has come into effect. The RHA has dramatically altered the landscape of renting in Wales which has and will continue to have an impact on homelessness in Monmouthshire.

- 1.11 The RHA has extended the rights of renters, the responsibilities of landlords and has simplified renting in Wales. Some of the most notable elements of the new law are:

- Tenants and Licensees have become 'Contract Holders', and tenancies are 'Occupation Contracts'.
- Contract Holders receive a written contract setting out their rights and responsibilities.
- The 'no fault notice period' has increased from two to six months.
- Greater protection from eviction.
- Improved succession rights.
- The flexibility to add or remove people to an occupation contract.
- The system is simplified into two types of occupation contract depending on whether the property is socially rented or from the private rented sector.
- Expansion of health and safety measures.
- Abandoned properties can be repossessed without needing a court order. (Welsh Government, 2024)

1.12 White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales²

- 1.13 In October 2023 the Welsh Government published their intention to change homelessness legislation in Wales this Senedd term.

- 1.14 The proposals contained within the White Paper have been put forward by an Independent Review Panel to redress any perceived limitations in The Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

- 1.15 Though the proposals contained in the White Paper have not yet passed into legislation, they set out an intent and direction that will fundamentally change the homelessness process and have significant implications to any future strategies Monmouthshire creates in relation to ending homelessness in the county.

Local/Regional Context

- #### **1.16 Monmouthshire County Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan³**

¹ [Housing law is changing: Renting Homes Wales | GOV.WALES](#)

² [White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales | GOV.WALES](#)

³ [Rapid-Rehousing-Transition-Plan-1.pdf \(monmouthshire.gov.uk\)](#)

- 1.17 Following the completion and publication of the HSP Monmouthshire Council set to develop a strategy for the council to transition to a Rapid Rehousing approach to homelessness.
- 1.18 Rapid Rehousing is an innovative approach to homelessness that has been adopted by Welsh Government. The ethos of Rapid Rehousing is to prevent homelessness, but where this is not possible to ensure homelessness is rare and unrepeated. The aim is to ensure that homeless households do not spend lengthy periods of time in unsuitable accommodation, and instead are placed into settled accommodation that meet their needs in a timely manner avoiding any additional trauma or detriment to wellbeing.
- 1.19 The key themes to a successful Rapid Rehousing transition are early intervention; support of the right kind at the right time, and the increase of affordable settled accommodation to meet the needs of homeless households. There is recognition in the Rapid Rehousing agenda that homelessness is not solely 'rooflessness' and that to truly tackle homelessness requires partnership between a number of agencies.
- 1.20 As part of the development of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan MCC collated and analysed homelessness data and conducted a support needs assessment. With the support of stakeholders MCC used the data to develop a vision for its Rapid Rehousing journey: '**Connected partnerships prevent homelessness and if not possible, time in temporary accommodation is brief facilitating well-being**' as well as 4 key priorities:
1. Prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity;
 2. Increase the supply of affordable and settled accommodation;
 3. Provide timely and effective support to sustain accommodation;
 4. Maximising resources and benefits through well connected partnerships.
- 1.21 Monmouthshire's Rapid Rehousing Transition and Action plans were adopted in 2023 and the subsequent journey towards to this approach complements and mirrors the goals of the HSP.
- 1.22 **Monmouthshire County Council Community and Corporate Plan 2022-2028⁴**
- 1.23 Monmouthshire County Council published its new strategic vision in the Community and Corporate Plan for the next 6 years.
- 1.24 Despite the change in priorities the Housing Support Programme Strategy will continue to support the overall aims of the council which are for Monmouthshire to be:
- A fair place to live
 - A green place
 - A thriving and ambitious place
 - A safe place
 - A connected place
 - A learning place.

⁴ [Community and Corporate Plan - Version 3.0 Council.pdf \(monmouthshire.gov.uk\)](#)

- 1.25 The actions from the HSP support the overall goal for Monmouthshire ‘to become a zero-carbon county, supporting wellbeing, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life’ and embodies the values of teamwork, openness, fairness, flexibility and kindness’.
- 1.26 **Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (VAWDASV): Gwent Regional Strategy 2023 – 2026 (Draft)⁵**
- 1.27 Victims of VAWDASV are vulnerable to experiencing homelessness, and therefore is a crucial need when devising any homelessness or support strategy. A regional, integrated approach is taken by Gwent to stop VAWDASV, support victims and ensure perpetrators are held accountable.
- 1.28 The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (VAWDASV): Gwent Regional Strategy 2023 – 2026 (Draft) builds upon the previous Gwent Regional VAWDASV Strategy 2018-2023 and has identified six objectives across the themes: Prevention, Protection and Provision of Support:
1. Challenge the public attitude to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across the Welsh population through awareness raising and space for public discussion with the aim to decrease its occurrence.
 2. Increase awareness in children, young people and adults of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and empowering them to positive personal choices.
 3. Increase the focus on holding those who commit abuse to account and supporting those who may carry out abusive or violent behaviour to change their behaviour and avoid offending.
 4. Make early intervention and prevention a priority.
 5. Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors.
 6. Provide all victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs-led, strength-based, inter-sectional, and responsive services across Wales.
- 1.29 The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (VAWDASV): Gwent Regional Strategy 2023 – 2026 (Draft)’s focus on prevention and support compliments the aims of the HSP to increase the prevention of homelessness and to provide good quality, timely support.

2 Review of Needs Assessment

Homelessness

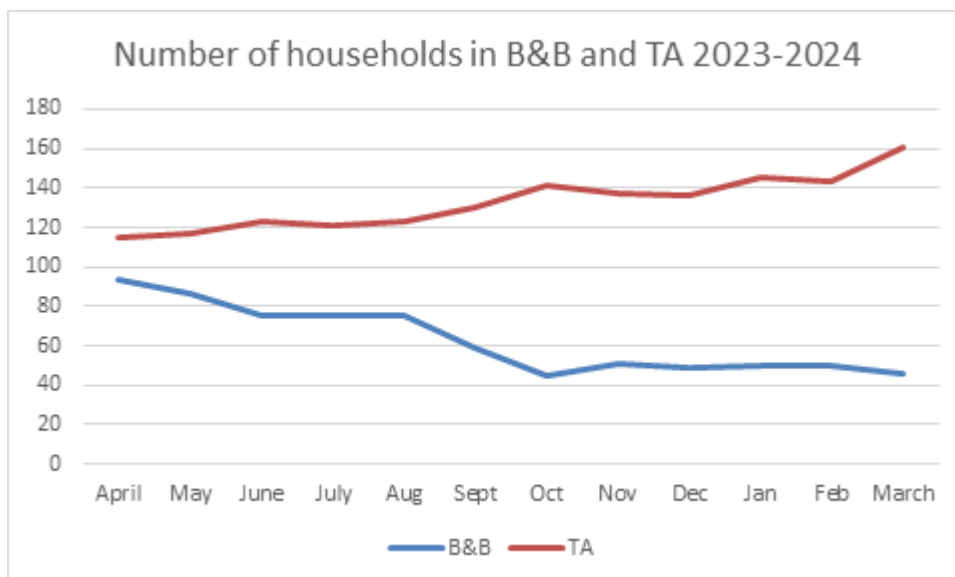
- 2.1 For the 2023 to 2024 financial year the Options team had conducted 460 homeless assessments (Section 62³ applied) and had issued 294 Section 73 duties. From these figures indications are that the peak numbers seen during the Pandemic has passed and numbers are slowly plateauing, though the proportion of those presenting proceeding to at least a Section 73 duty remains high at 64%.

Year	Total Assessments (S62)
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⁵ [Gwent Regional VAWDASV Strategy 2023-2026 - DRAFT for Consultation \(gwentsafeguarding.org.uk\)](https://gwentsafeguarding.org.uk)

2017-2018	533
2018-2019	440
2019-2020	783
2020-2021	379
2021-2022	773
2022-2023	598
2023-2024	460

2.2 As can be seen below, numbers in B&B have been slowly reducing and have largely been on an overall downward trend since the peak of 95 in B&B in July 2022. What this graph illustrates well is the link between B&B and the use of wider temporary accommodation. The Council's Monmouthshire Lettings Scheme (MLS) works with landlord to privately lease accommodation to use as temporary accommodation for homeless households. This graph indicates a strong positive correlation, whereby the number of temporary accommodation units procured has an almost symmetrical impact in the number of households in B&B.



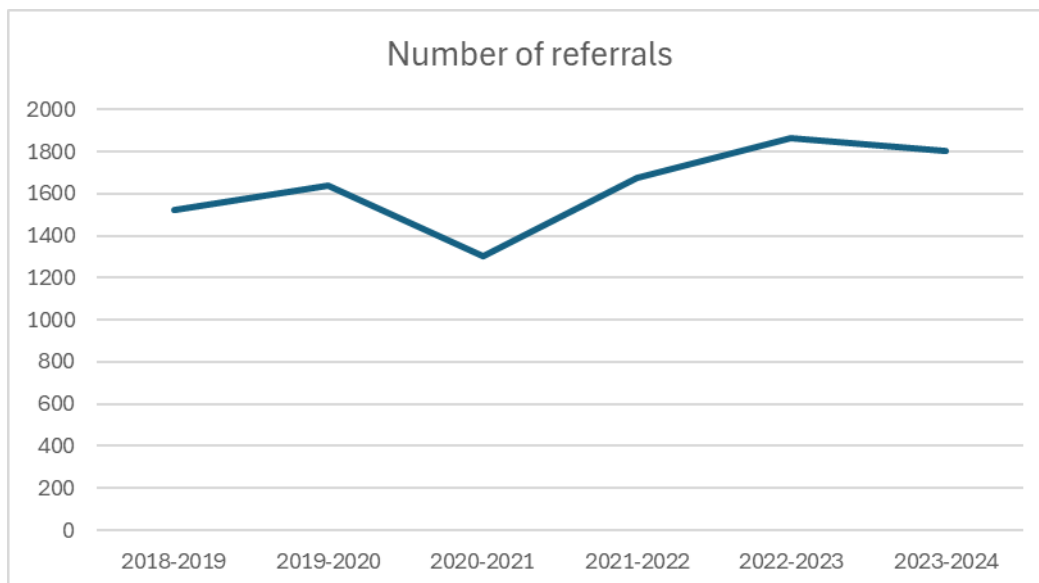
2.3 Part of the reason the numbers in Temporary Accommodation remain high is due to the lack of alternative housing options in Monmouthshire for households to resolve their own homelessness. Prevention Officers will work with households to prevent homelessness and had a 71% success rate as for 2023-2024. 30% of those successfully prevented were resettled into Private Rented Accommodation following a landlord incentive. Often an incentive is required to secure private rented properties for homeless households and Prevention Officers will sometimes offer additional payment through the Discretionary Homelessness Prevention Fund or by the council becoming a guarantor. 29% were accommodated in social housing. Of those that were not successful 42% were due to PRS being unaffordable or unavailable.

2.4 Market rents in Monmouthshire are amongst the highest in Wales⁵, and the scarcity of properties to rent only adds to their premium. The only housing option for most households is social housing. In 2018-2019 the average wait for a social housing property for those in Band 2b was 3.7 months. The average wait for a household in Band 1⁶ was 11.5 months for 2023-2024. So, in 2023/2024 households that become homeless are waiting longer for affordable housing and as a result staying longer in council temporary accommodation.

Lead need breakdown

2.5 As part of the review of the HSP a desktop needs assessment was conducted across all HSG services to ensure that the priorities remain relevant for the next two years. The lead needs identified have been collected from each financial year to demonstrate where need is greatest, and an exercise to establish the breakdown in the level of need was completed on June 12th. Going forwards the HSG team have implemented a process for providers to record level of need across their service users continuously.

2.6 The number of referrals into HSG services remains high, although has dipped slightly from a peak in 2022-2023. The consistently high demand for support has put pressure on service delivery, particularly in the current environment of high inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, widening the gulf between the HSG funding allocated from WG and the cost of providing much needed high quality support services.

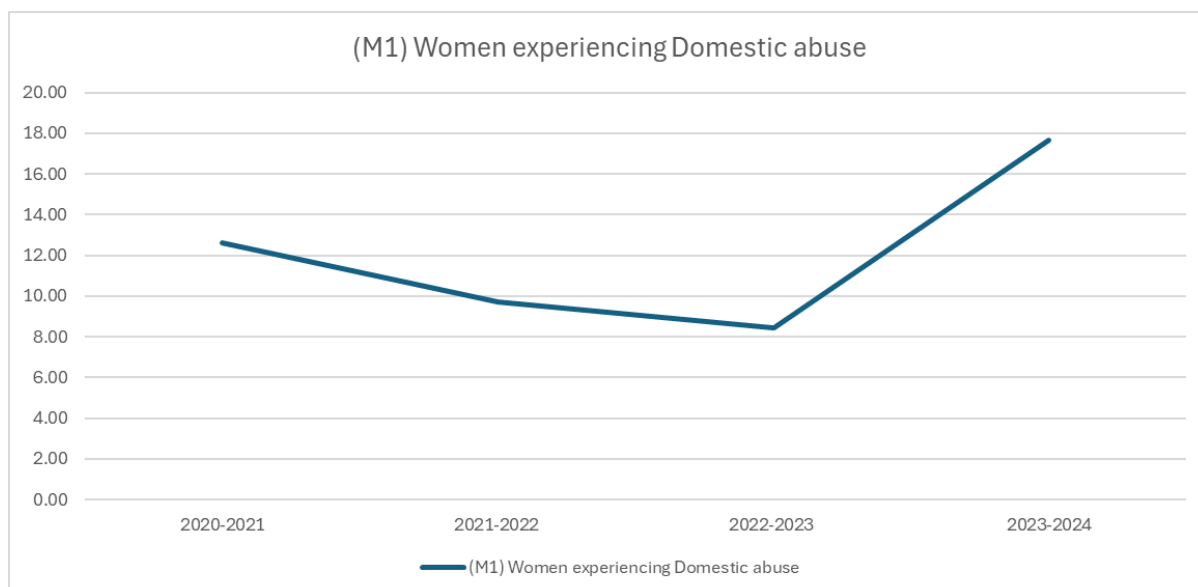


2.7 As was found in the needs assessment conducted on those in TA in October 2021, Mental Health remains the most significant need amongst all households seeking support by quite a considerable margin. To account for the variation in the number of referrals the percentage allocated to each lead need has been used for comparisons.

Lead Need (% of referrals)	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
(M4) People with Mental Health issues	35.74	36.55	34.77	34.35

(M1) Women experiencing Domestic abuse	12.61	9.72	8.44	17.65
(M17) People over 55 years of age with Support Needs (this category must be exclusive of alarm services)	4.77	5.01	6.45	9.05
(M13) Young People with Support Needs (16 to 24)	8.92	6.38	7.25	5.33
(M9) People with physical and/or Sensory disabilities	4.15	5.31	4.73	5.11
(M16) Single People with Support Needs , not listed above (25 to 54)	7.53	7.57	7.85	5.11
(M14) Single parent families with Support Needs	5.30	6.92	6.99	4.72
(M18) Generic/Floating Support/Peripatetic (tenancy support services which cover a range of user needs)	4.61	5.90	2.58	3.66
(M15) Families with Support Needs	5.84	4.95	6.88	2.94
(M6) People with Substance Misuse issues	1.31	2.03	1.77	2.11
(M12) Young People who are Care leavers	0.38	0.36	0.81	2.11
(M5) People with Alcohol Issues	0.92	1.31	2.47	1.50
(M7) People with Criminal Offending History	2.84	2.50	2.10	1.50
(M8) People with refugee status	0.00	0.00	3.12	1.44
(M2) Men experiencing Domestic Abuse	2.15	1.91	1.13	1.28
(M3) People with Learning Disabilities	1.61	2.03	1.24	0.94
(M10) People with Developmental Disorders (i.e. Autism)	0.77	0.89	0.70	0.72
(M11) People with Chronic Illnesses (including HIV/AIDS)	0.54	0.66	0.75	0.50

2.8 Whilst Mental Health needs remain most prevalent there are indications that the demand is beginning to decline very slowly. In contrast there has been a surprising significant growth in women requiring support with domestic abuse. The proportion of referrals in this category has more than doubled in the space of a year following a steady decline in the previous three.



- 2.9 Although this is not in line with the trends in DA reported by the ONS which is showing a broadly similar prevalence of reported incidents between 2022-2023 and 2023-2024⁶, the significant increase here can be attributed to a change in process which is capturing what would have otherwise been a hidden need.
- 2.10 For the last financial year the HSG team have been receiving PPN reports from the Safeguarding Team relating to domestic abuse incidents. This then triggers contact and referrals into domestic abuse support services. The increase in referrals to these specialised services demonstrates the value in early, upstream interventions to ensure people are offered the right support as they need it. Without the introduction of this preventative process a significant number of households may not be identified at the first opportunity and may have instead been picked up in crisis, where outcomes are generally less positive.

Level of need breakdown

2.11 HSG providers were asked to submit the level of need for each service user on June 12th using the definitions below. Though this was an exercise completed for the HSP review the HSG database has been upgraded to capture this data continuously going forward so any fluctuations in support need level can be interrogated.

Level of Need	Definition
Low	People who have very low support requirements, who can be supported into settled accommodation with either a low level of support or just signposting.
Medium	People likely to need floating support but may also require support from other professional services to live independently in settled or temporary accommodation.
High	People who have persistent complex needs and/or a history of repeat rough sleeping
Intense	People who are unable to live independently, perhaps due to concerns around risk to self or others or perhaps even choice. Engagement from professionals such as Social Care and Health to be/or are involved.

- 2.12 The definitions accompanying each level of need have been altered from those used in the original support need survey for the HSP in 2022. This is because the accompanying equivalent support required guidelines were found to be causing confusion amongst front line workers, where some service users were assessed based on the support they receive in terms of time, rather than the support they need.
- 2.13 Additionally, the level of support needs assessment has been applied to all service users, not limited to those accommodated in TA. For these reasons comparisons between this data, and the data produced in 2022 would yield unreliable commentary.

⁶ [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/domestic-abuse-prevalence-and-trends-england-and-wales)

2.14 As of the 12th June there were 970 people in receipt of support. The breakdown of the level of support need amongst this group is broken down below:

Level of support need	Number of households	As a percentage of total
Low	398	41.03%
Medium	431	44.43%
High	115	11.86%
Intense	21	2.16%
Not Complete	5	0.52%

2.15 The majority of HSG commissioned services have been designed to support households with low to medium support needs which matches the majority of those requiring support . However, there are still a number of households who require more intensive support, 14% of the total or 136 households. At present Monmouthshire does not have the resources to effectively meet the needs of this cohort due to the restrictions in funding. Monmouthshire would benefit from a dedicated complex needs provision.

3 Achievements to date

3.1 As part of the review of the HSP the accompanying action plan was updated and can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2 The actions that have been taken so thus far have helped Monmouthshire to make progress against the goal for homelessness to become 'rare, brief and unrepeatable' in the county.

- The Council is now more routinely identifying households at risk of future homelessness and is intervening earlier (6 months).
- The percentage of homelessness successfully prevented has increased from 49.6%⁷ during 2021-2022 to 71% for 2023-2024.
- Homeless applications have reduced from 631 in 2022-2023 to 460 in 2023-2024.
- Households owed a S73 accommodation duty has reduced from 405 in 2021-2022 to 294 in 2023-2024.
- Households placed in B & B has reduced from 389 (2021-2022) to 222 (2023-2024).
- Homeless households in Band 1 of the Housing Register have fallen from 340 to 303 (April 2024).
- The flow of homeless people through social housing has improved. The percentage of social housing vacancies allocated to homeless households has remained steady at around 60% and is one of the highest in Wales.
- Increased take up of Social Housing Grant and Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme funding.
- There has been a net increase in the number of Monmouthshire Lettings units of 17 over 2023-2024.

⁷ As reported by WHO 12

3.3 A selection of specific measures taken or introduced have been listed against each priority below:

1. **To identify those at risk of homelessness earlier and provide timely interventions to prevent homelessness occurring.**

- Promoting the availability of Welsh Government Homeless Prevention Grant to partners agencies who can refer in households who may be at risk of homelessness eg arrears, debt etc
- Housing Options Team restructure to create a First Contact Officer to enable Housing Options Officers to be more prevention focused through a reduced administrative burden.
- Reviewing all homelessness communications and information to ensure correct information is shared in an accessible format has led to the website to be updated and informative videos to be filmed to accompany legal letters.

2. **To provide timely and effective support for vulnerable residents particularly for those with high and complex needs.**

- The Housing Support Service has increased their Benefits services to help vulnerable people ensure they are receiving the correct benefits and look at their household income and outgoings to support them to sustain their tenancies.
- The Housing First project has expanded their current service with another support worker.
- A full review of HSG commissioned services began in 2023 and a HSG Planning Group has been set up to help with future modelling, needs, gaps and plan for the services required to meet the needs of the vulnerable people in Monmouthshire.
- The HSG team now receive PPN reports from the Safeguarding Team relating to domestic abuse incidents. This then triggers contact and referrals into domestic abuse support services. This has increased the number of women referred into DA services who may otherwise have remained hidden.

3. **To Increase access to a range of affordable and suitable housing solutions for homeless households, both temporary and permanent.**

- Promoting Monmouthshire Letting Scheme and Leasing Scheme Wales. A campaign was designed with the help of the Council's communications team and was launched at the Usk Show in September 2023. The campaign resulted in an immediate increase in enquiries through our lettings team.
- The development of an 'Acquisitions Strategy' to supplement the availability of temporary accommodation through purchasing homes and repurposing existing Council owned assets subject to Cabinet approval. The Council has completed the purchase of one property and a former care home facility and one former agricultural property is due to be repurposed as temporary accommodation.
- Work with RSLs have been successful and a number of barriers have been overcome through partnership working at the Homeseach Operational Group. At present, rent in advance payments have been waived for those with a homelessness duty and a new procedure has been introduced to reduce the barriers to social housing for those with arrears.

4. **To move to a Rapid Re-Housing Approach.**

- Monmouthshire Council's Rapid Rehousing Plan has been adopted and is currently being implemented.

5. **To maximise and increase the availability and effectiveness of financial, staffing/workforce and collaborative resources available for tackling homelessness.**
- The Council has established a Strategic Housing Forum with RSL partners. A key aim is to increase the delivery of affordable housing through tackling delivery barriers and maximising the availability of resources.
 - A Housing Intervention Panel is organised to bring together key agencies to discuss complex housing cases. By taking a broad and holistic approach to case management there are frequent breakthroughs and positive outcomes.
 - For frontline staff and partner agencies the Housing Support Grant team organise recurring Support Worker and Support Provider forums. These forums facilitate information sharing and promote an understanding between teams of roles, responsibilities, and limits.
 - Additional revenue to facilitate additional Housing Options Team staffing to support accommodation management.
 - Additional revenue to fund a rent management system.
 - The council has approved plans to repurpose some council assets for homelessness use.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 Though there are indications that the number of households requiring housing related support and homelessness assistance are plateauing, and in some cases possibly declining, demand is still considerably higher than pre-Pandemic.
- 4.2 The lack of affordable housing alternatives to social rent, and the scarcity of these properties are forcing homeless households to remain in temporary accommodation for longer periods. Whilst Monmouthshire Council has been successful in utilising SHG and TACP allocations in recent years it is recognised that supply remains in deficit to demand and that cessation of temporary accommodation altogether will not be achievable in the immediate future. Work remains ongoing to reduce the use and dependence on B&B accommodation and to build capacity of affordable settled accommodation through all means available.
- 4.3 Preventing homelessness from occurring is a key priority for Monmouthshire as it will deliver the best outcomes all round. At present the focus is on changes that can be made in the Housing department to streamline processes and also promote services that can assist households with housing related issues prior to crisis. For contract holders and landlords identifying when things may be going wrong and knowing where to access support is the first step in Monmouthshire Council's prevention strategy.

- 4.4 Referrals into support remain high. Mental Health remains the most significant support need amongst those presenting, and anecdotally mental ill health has been the biggest challenge to the Housing Options Team when placing and supporting households in temporary accommodation. What has been more surprising is the proportion of those assessed as having 'Low' support needs which would not be in line with the trends seen in previous assessments or fit with anecdotal evidence. The majority of HSG commissioned services have been designed to support households with low to medium support needs which matches the majority of those requiring support according to this assessment. Even so, there still remains over 100 households whose support needs cannot be adequately met by current HSG provision in Monmouthshire at present.
- 4.5 The provision of adequate support that matches the needs of the demographic is crucial to prevent homelessness from happening, or from repeating. However, HSG services are facing mounting pressure that is threatening their viability in the absence of budget uplifts. The costs faced by services are continually rising due to staff salary uplifts, inflation and the cost of living. During the last year 2023-24, the HSG Commissioning Team managed to uphold the capacity of housing support services by working in partnership with providers and utilising the cost-of-living uplift in HSG grant; but even with services maintained there was a waiting list of 95 households for support at the end of the financial year. There is concern that capacity may have to reduce as projects are becoming financially unsustainable as we move forward into 2024-25.
- 4.6 Homelessness is a multi-faceted issue and requires input and innovative thinking from a wide range of agencies. Monmouthshire Council will always strive towards efficiency of resources and opportunities to collaborate with partners.
- 4.7 When all is considered all the priorities as set out in the 2022's HSP strategy remain relevant in the face of the challenges felt in 2024. Monmouthshire has adopted its own Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan which compliments the HSP and is in the process of being implemented.