

# Caerphilly County Borough Housing Strategy: An Agenda for Change – December 2021 to December 2026

Introduction by Cllr. Lisa Phipps, Cabinet Member for Housing

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## Our vision for the Housing Offer in Caerphilly County Borough

Our housing offer will be an affordable and attractive one. It will support an excellent quality of life, being connected economically, physically and socially and in communities to be proud of.

The new homes that are built will improve choice and quality. New homes will be zero net carbon and through retrofitting of existing homes we will deliver climate resilient homes in response to the climate emergency. Existing homes will be well managed and receive the investment that they need to ensure their safety, security, warmth and physical accessibility.

There will be a safe, decent and affordable offer regardless of whether people buy or rent in the social or private rented sector.

For those requiring specialist accommodation, in need, homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, there will be options and support available.

Our homes and communities will deliver high quality green infrastructure and promote good health.

In order to achieve this vision the Council will work alongside our partners to support mixed communities to thrive and provide services that meet the needs and aspirations of all residents.

Five strategic priorities have been identified to help achieve the vision:

### Creating Better Choices

We are focusing on Person Centred Solutions, moving away from blanket ground policies and engaging more with residents so that we may better understand people's needs, develop tailored solutions that promote equality and reduce inequality. This will bring new offers for first time buyers, keyworkers, people requiring adaptations, people in mid and later life and people who rent their home.

### Creating Great Places to Live

We believe that good design and creating sustainable, liveable places will help deliver strong, lasting communities with housing that people want. Our regeneration and investment plans will seek to rebalance housing markets across the County Borough. Collectively we will invest in environmentally sustainable and energy-efficient materials and technologies for new and existing homes thereby delivering on the climate emergency that the Council has declared.

### Creating Healthy Homes & Vibrant Communities

Our Local Housing Strategy cuts across tenure to offer support, advice and solutions to improve the quality and health of people's lives and homes. We will promote the Caerphilly Cares model and we will work in partnership with Private Landlords to

improve the offer for tenants and use all available powers to tackle poor quality accommodation

## Delivering New Homes

Caerphilly is 'Open for Business'. Recognising that whilst there are challenges to delivery there is a determination and plan to create innovative solutions that will establish models and funding to bring new housing into communities, supported with new infrastructure. The Council will build new Council homes and invest in the housing market to support housing providers to build more homes.

## Supporting Specialist Housing Needs

A specialist accommodation prospectus will drive forward new development that supports independence and positive pathways for people with complex needs. We will focus on preventing homelessness and rough sleeping by providing specialist and timely advice and increased housing options.

These priorities are informed by evidence of housing need in the County Borough and what we have heard from our residents and partners.

In addition to the five priorities, we are also committing to the following cross-cutting themes that reflect our values and commitments:

- Sustainable development – achieving a better and more sustainable future
- Health and wellbeing – improving health outcomes and promoting wellbeing.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion – providing services without barriers, which respect difference and promote inclusion

## Delivering the strategy

The strategy is supported by a Delivery Plan, developed in partnership, which sets out what will be done, when and by whom, to deliver on each of the key priorities. We will continue to monitor our progress, inviting scrutiny to drive up quality and benchmark performance.

## Creating Better Choices

Some people choose to buy, whilst others rent a home and people need to make different choices throughout their life. We are committed to supporting people to be able to have access to a good quality, secure and affordable home regardless of whether they rent or buy. This means that we need to ensure that there is a choice of homes across Caerphilly in terms of size and type of housing and at different prices and rents. Living where you can afford and having security, helps people put down roots and have a stable base, a sense of community and belonging and so the quality of the management of rented homes also affects choice.

Using the Local Housing Market Assessment we will set out plans to create a more balanced housing offer for different groups of people. Our priorities will focus on co-producing tailored solutions to help remove barriers that people in our housing market currently experience. This will promote equality and diversity and underpin health and wellbeing. We want to ensure that there are housing choices for everybody living in Caerphilly from first time buyers to households looking to upsize as their family grows, right through to 'right sizing' for people in later life.

### Support for People Who Want to Buy a Home

The social landlords working in Caerphilly have a successful track record of delivering affordable home-ownership options. The Council want to widen this offer and are introducing a Low-Cost Home Ownership product for people that aspire to home ownership but cannot afford to buy, without financial assistance. It will enable people to buy a home, delivered through s.106 agreements or through homes built by the Council, and will typically offer an equity loan of up to 30% but this could be higher to reduce the purchase price of new homes. It will be promoted to lower- and middle-income first-time buyers and key workers wanting to access affordable home ownership and during the lifetime of this strategy, we will explore the potential of introducing a similar product for properties on the existing housing market.

We want to attract more people to move to the north of the County Borough and will research potential products that may help achieve this. We want to attract first time buyers, tenants wanting to buy, newly forming households, graduates returning to Caerphilly and key workers. It could follow a 'homesteading' model that offers homes at below market value but requiring investment and could form part of the empty home's strategy.

### Support for People Who Own Their Home

We think that challenges of affordability may be limiting households to move as their families expand and we will test this in the Local Housing Market Assessment. If this is the case, we want to consider whether support can be provided through an equity loan for up sizing. It would work in the same way as the Low-Cost Home Ownership equity loan and would be available on new and existing homes.

Where households own their own property and need to have extensive adaptations undertaken to support specialist housing requirements of family members, the

Council can provide a Disabled Facilities Grant; the maximum grant is £36,000. There are occasions where there remains a shortfall and we will be exploring the potential of offering an equity loan to bridge this gap. It may also be applied where households live in homes that are unsuitable for adaptations and a move to a new home is required but unaffordable.

Recently, the Right to Buy opportunity for social tenants was removed in Wales and we will try and support tenants who want to buy a home to do so through these homeownership solutions.

## Support for People Who Rent a Home in the Private Rented Sector

The Private Rented Sector accounts for around 12% of all homes across Caerphilly. It is a housing option on which many households are now dependent, and our evidence confirms that it is a natural progression for many newly forming households. Our evidence shows rent levels are increasing, an outcome of a popular market with a shortage of property.

We want to ensure that this sector provides the best possible properties and management services that it can, and our evidence suggests that there is room for improvement. We know the sector is dominated by older terraced housing, often in need of investment, many with low rent levels and there are around 200 Houses in Multiple Occupation, often of low quality but not requiring a license. When we get complaints, they tend to be about tenancy management, which suggests that landlords may need some further support.

We want to improve the offer that is available in Caerphilly and so we will:

- continue to be a partner in Rent Smart Wales, a national organisation that assists those who let or manage rental properties to comply with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 obligations and provides advice and relevant training on renting safe and healthy homes. Over 90% of rented properties in the borough are now registered.
- increase our knowledge of who is living in the Private Rented Sector through primary research as part of our revised Local Housing Market Assessment and tailor our approach to intervention based on what residents living in it, or plan to live in it, tell us.
- Maximise the take up of funding to support home improvements for tenants through government schemes or Rent Smart Wales.
- continue to grow membership of our Landlord Forum. Whilst we want to positively work with landlords, where we need to, we will use our enforcement powers to improve the sector.
- develop a section of the Caerphilly website that provides advice and support for tenants. This would include advice on finding a property, standard contracts, claiming benefit, rights and responsibilities, how to complain, Rent Smart Wales, adaptations and energy efficiency etc.
- explore the potential of creating a new build offer, potentially focused on our town centres but also as part of the offer in other locations. We will research opportunities, potential demand and the type of property that should be provided

and the levels of rent that would provide housing options for key workers. We will work with developers and social landlords to deliver on this offer and the Council may also be involved in its delivery.

## Support for People Who Live in Social Housing

Around 20% of people in Caerphilly live in social housing. The largest landlord is the Council but homes are also provided by Linc Cymru, Pobl Group, United Welsh and Wales & West housing associations.

Our evidence and the Welsh Government Household projections tell us that we need to increase the supply of affordable homes and in particular provide more smaller (1 bed) and larger (4 bed) homes but requirements are different across Caerphilly and future provision will take this into account. Our updated evidence base will consider the needs of people who are on our waiting list as well as feedback from primary research, so that we can get an accurate understanding of future need and current provision.

Whilst we have fewer smaller and larger social homes, the council has too many 3 bed homes an over provision of 3 bed homes in some locations and we are considering different options to undertake extensions and loft conversions to increase the number of bedrooms and convert some homes into smaller flats. We will explore options of selling surplus stock to first time buyers or growing households and using the receipt to replace with smaller and larger new homes. As part of improving how we best use our stock, we have developed a detailed understanding of the accessibility of Council owned homes and have established a central repository that updates stock and medical categories for all social housing allowing our Housing Solutions Team to better match tenants needs with properties. We will be working with social landlord partners to do the same.

Through the Memorandum of Understanding with social landlords, we will challenge all social housing providers, including the Council, to work toward consistent standards of management that 'raise the bar' and our offer for tenants living in social housing. We want the service across Caerphilly to be at the forefront of good practice, building on the tenancy support already offered to reduce the need for enforcement. We want to look at how we can measure the health of our communities, support resilient communities and promote the positive outcomes set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. We will be developing shared performance indicators to monitor our impact and success.

The Council will revolutionise its services through digital technology and investment that provide improved customer focus and enable people centred services. We will be utilising data and information about tenants to support predictive analytics as a means of identifying forthcoming need and tailoring services. We will take services into communities through customer hubs and agile working and create more opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to engage through internet-based opportunities, to manage their accounts and order repairs. Customers will be able to have multiple queries dealt with in a single interaction and front-line staff will have the tools and information they need to operate across departmental boundaries.

## Delivering a Better Offer in Later Life

Our population is ageing. In 2033, 23.5% of the population will be in the 65 and over age group, an increase from 19.3% in 2018<sup>1</sup>. Where and how older people live depends on their individual needs, taste, lifestyle and financial circumstances, much the same as any other age group. The majority of older people will remain living in their current home as they age but others will want to or will need to move. There will be older people who live independently all of their lives, whilst some people will need specialist care and support.

We value people in later life, want to promote equality between generations, so that residents are able to contribute to and benefit from sustained prosperity and enjoy a good quality of life.

Our evidence tells us that the majority of older people, want to remain living in their own homes, whilst others want to move. The ageing population will necessitate a renewed emphasis on ensuring that support is available to enable people to remain living in their own homes but for those that do want to move, a diverse range of housing is available.

This will require new homes to be built as Lifetime homes and designed with potential care needs and accessibility in mind. There is also a need to have much better options for those who would like to move to a home of a more appropriate size, in a location that enables them to easily access local services and facilities. Working with partners, we will introduce a 'road map' that sets out how we will design and develop a housing offer for older people. It will be based on engagement with older people and recognise that whilst new housing options are required, the majority of older people want to and will age in their current home. We will:

- compare how the current offer meets what older people tell us they want and where the gaps in provision are.
- set out a framework of investment and partnerships for meeting those gaps and in particular the role of social landlords through the Memorandum of Understanding.
- establish the types of support services required such as support for rightsizing.
- explore the options to expand the services of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to maintain independent living for longer.
- consider whether the 2<sup>nd</sup> replacement LDP should have formal requirements for older person provision, linked to site thresholds.
- build on the growth of digital technologies introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, for example remote care concepts have been implemented much more widely and there been a major surge in the digital take up of older people. This can help support engagement, improve inclusion and reduce isolation.
- remodel, redesignate and redevelop the Council's sheltered accommodation in response to changing needs and aspirations of older tenants and secure the future of these assets.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Stats Wales 2018-based population projections

# Creating Great Places to Live

## Supporting Equality, Investment & Opportunity

Our commitment to a County Borough wide Wellbeing and Place Shaping Framework will see us encourage, facilitate and support investment that make 'great places to live'. We want places to be inspired by the people who live there, promote sociability, have great schools and access to great health care. Places should have good and sustainable transport system so that people can access quality jobs and training, a retail and leisure offer and good quality housing. We know that not all places are created equal and that we have locations with long term structural socio-economic problems where targeted investment will make significant changes, often beyond the investment itself, creating support for local business and creating local employment.

We have set out a vision and opportunity to address these challenges through a strategically coordinated approach set out in our '*Regeneration Strategy-a foundation for Success*'<sup>2</sup>. Here, we are linking investment decisions with targeted outcomes and maximising the potential of the Cardiff Capital Region with the investment of City Deal, the Valleys Taskforce and further funding streams. An unwavering approach to tackle some of the most deep-seated issues that the County Borough is facing, sets out improvements to transport connectivity, increasing, still further, people's skill levels, supporting people into work and giving businesses the support, they need to innovate and grow. A key element in the proposals is the Metro, a new transport system for the region that will provide faster, more frequent and joined up services using trains, buses and rail, connecting people, places and jobs.

We want to align this Strategy with the priorities of the Regeneration Strategy, to close the gap between the North and South of the County Borough. Underpinning this will be the housing offer; a residential offer that supports a more prosperous, healthier, resilient and equal Caerphilly. Getting the housing offer right in terms of type, size, tenure and price and in communities that are sustainable in terms of popularity, crime, environment and access to services is essential. The interdependence of the regeneration and housing strategies is critical. A key outcome of both is to raise income levels to afford better homes and services.

Achieving this involves assisting existing residents in accessing better paid employment, encouraging young professionals/managers and families to remain in the area and attracting more residents to move into the area. This is a significant challenge for us and one that we understand can only be delivered through partnership with other stakeholders and we will be working closely with social landlords to establish how we maximise the impact of housing led regeneration in terms of both new homes and support for the foundational economy.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/RegenerationStrategy>



## The Imbalance of Our Housing Markets

At the moment, there are significant variations across the County Borough. The choice of housing in the Heads of Valley is particularly limited and, in some villages, up to 90% of housing is pre-1914 terraced housing which is generally poorer quality with challenges for achieving modern energy standards and often not adaptable to modern family living. The majority of homes have 3 bedrooms, with limited choices of smaller and larger accommodation. Whilst prices are generally more affordable, this can impact on the viability of new housing schemes and so there are fewer new homes built, reducing choice further. That said, our evidence suggests that people will move here for the right property and we believe that the Covid-19 pandemic may offer a platform for demand in the north as more people choose to live in more rural settings and work from home.

The Northern Connections Corridor (NCC) has been successful in attracting substantial public and private investment, transforming this part of the County Borough and bringing new housing development and jobs. This has led to an increased diversity in the housing stock in terms of the type of homes available but there is a need to identify more land to build more homes. A lack of supply of new homes alongside the popularity of the area means that prices have been pushed upwards and homes are unaffordable to buy or rent for many people. This situation may worsen further as the Principal Town of Ystrad Mynach is a significant employment centre and has been identified along with Caerphilly as a Strategic Hub by the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys, Our Valleys, Our Future; and this is likely to create additional demand for new homes.

The Caerphilly Basin is the highest value market in the County Borough with strong links to the Cardiff housing market. The Caerphilly Basin has been a focus for housing development and has a better diversity of housing stock than other locations. As with the Northern Connection Corridors, rising demand and prices has impacted negatively on affordability but this area is more affordable than Cardiff and attracts residents unable to afford prices in the capital. Widening the choice of homes for rent and sale could attract further households.

Lower Islwyn market area is included as part of the Southern Connections Corridor in the Local Development Plan strategy, alongside Caerphilly Basin. However, in housing market terms the two areas are distinct housing markets with Lower Islwyn relating well to the Newport housing market rather than Cardiff and with private rent levels close to the northern corridors than the higher levels in Caerphilly. This imbalance in our markets is limiting choice for people to put down roots in Caerphilly. The latest 2018-based population projections show that the County Borough is losing younger age groups and retaining and attracting these households with an economic and housing offer is a priority. The same data also confirms the growth of older households and creating an offer for housing in later life is just as important.

## Rebalancing Our Housing Markets

There are 5 masterplans that set out the spatial investment framework to achieve the positive outcomes set out in the Regeneration Strategy. These are in Caerphilly

Basin, Ystrad Mynach Heads of the Valleys, Greater Blackwood and the Newbridge to Risca Corridor. Housing led regeneration will play a significant role in delivering many of these outcomes.

As the evidence base is updated, housing priorities will be developed that provide detailed housing requirements in communities where we know there are gaps in supply through co-production to reflect the ambitions of local people.

We will develop detailed guidance for investors in our market and promote them through our developer hub that will set out:

- the current and (2) future target mix of type, size, tenure and affordability of homes relative to local incomes.
- the number of new homes of each type, size, tenure and affordability (income) required in order to move from the current to the new position; and
- explain how this mix of new homes, the people who live in them and any other local development and infrastructure will create a better balance for the market.

## Repurposing Town Centres

Like most Welsh towns, those across Caerphilly are witnessing unparalleled change in consumer habits. Town centres must evolve and the Covid-19 pandemic legacy is likely to accelerate that evolution. Catering for 'live-work-play' alongside technology-enabled shopping perhaps sums up the diversified role that centres require to survive. Day, evening, and night-time economies will become more common place as people work ever more flexibly and our recovery out of the Covid-19 pandemic will prioritise our town centre first approach.

In recent years there has been significant investment in Ystrad Mynach, Blackwood, Risca, Caerphilly and Bargoed, however continued investment by both the private and public sector is necessary if town centre businesses are to succeed and flourish. Town Centre Action plans are being produced to coordinate major development opportunities to diversify the existing offer within Town Centres and retain more expenditure within the local economy. Caerphilly has been awarded £700k targeted regeneration investment funding from Welsh Government and will invest in projects in town centres that promote economic regeneration and create the right environment for businesses to grow and thrive.

An important outcome will be creating town centres that are attractive places to live. During the lifetime of this Strategy, we will introduce more opportunities to live in town centres, above shops and promote mixed use development and will explore demand through the Local Housing Market Assessment. New homes in town centres will serve to address a number of key objectives such as addressing the acute shortage of homes; diversify the housing offer, increasing expenditure in local retailing and adding life in the evenings/ weekends. Where investors in our town centres need our support to maintain thriving centres, we will work to achieve this.

## Supporting Good Quality Places and Design

Placemaking and sustainable development will be a major consideration in the selection of sites for inclusion in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement LDP.

Supporting good quality places and design creates places where people want to live and so we will work with local communities to develop a 'Caerphilly checklist' and we will use it throughout our planning and place-shaping activity to make sure we consider all the important elements in how to develop good quality places. Such a checklist might include:

- infrastructure – including GPs, schools, road traffic: How are the infrastructure requirements of the new development being considered?
- parks and green spaces: How will the development minimise the impact on our green spaces and/or create new parks and green spaces?
- transport, active travel, air pollution: How does the new development enable people to get around in a way that limits air pollution?
- Decarbonisation-how will the development promote this agenda, does it support car free living, provide car charging points.
- connected, healthy people: How will the development produce spaces where people like to meet and congregate?
- asset-based approach: Are we building on local community assets and creating resilient communities based on their strengths and local assets?
- healthy living: How might the new environment support people to become more active? The quality of local food shops?
- access to healthcare and schools: How will the people living there access healthcare in their community? How will their children be enrolled in schools?

Meeting Zero carbon targets, promoting innovation and exemplary design

The Council has formally declared a climate emergency as a Notice of Motion and as a result of this has committed to being net carbon neutral in its operation by 2030. We will develop a policy framework within the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Local Development Plan that presumes in favour of carbon friendly construction and where we build new homes, will use carbon friendly construction methods which result in a reduction in energy consumption in all new housing developments. We will use, innovative housing techniques such as modular build and passivhaus which will utilise eco-friendly material to create highly efficient homes.

In addition to improving the speed and efficiency of the housebuilding process, there are many potential environmental benefits associated with the construction of new homes in a factory setting as opposed to directly on-site. These include a reduction in road traffic movements from construction vehicles, leading to both congestion and pollution benefits; reductions in energy usage, both during the construction and occupation of homes; and significant reductions in waste materials. All new homes will achieve a minimum EPC band A rating and energy efficient glazing and insulation that minimise heat loss, introduce efficient internal heating systems and reduce overall levels of carbon.

The Memorandum of Understanding with social landlords and the Council's participation in an all Wales Council House Development Forum includes commitments to work collaboratively and share knowledge and resources to work towards delivering more energy efficient housing. During the lifetime of the strategy further opportunities will be explored to develop local modular off site construction opportunities to help develop at scale and pace, reduce energy consumption and options that create heat and power by using photovoltaics, ground source and air source energy and heating.

As well as delivering increased energy efficiency, innovation in design and construction also creates better quality housing. We are collectively exploring the use of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) in which homes are built off site, precision manufactured and built with high levels of quality control. The Council will ensure that the necessary smart infrastructure is introduced within homes to future proof them so they can take full advantage of emerging SMART technologies.

Guidance on housing design is set out in Supplementary Planning Guidance and Welsh Government's Beautiful Homes and Spaces (2020):  
[LDP6 - Building Better Places to Live](#)  
[LDP7 - Householder Developments \(PDF 898kb\)](#)

In addition, our Highways service has prepared the Highways design guide that sets out standards for road design in developments.

## Creating Healthy Homes and Vibrant Communities

The impact of a safe, warm and secure home is remarkable to health and wellbeing. It improves general health outcomes and enables people to maintain independence; it is the platform on which people can build their future. It can prevent physical and mental ill health and reduce hospital admissions; it can support us to get better more quickly and enable timely discharge from hospital. Good health is an asset that the Council will support and build on and good quality homes and communities will help to achieve it.

Unfortunately, not everyone has the same opportunities for good health. Those who are elderly or young, isolated, without a support network, and adults with disabilities are more likely to be affected. Investing in housing, particularly for vulnerable people, can support better health and reduce costs of other public services. We want to focus on collaborative opportunities that can help create healthy homes and communities.

### Our commitment to Caerphilly Cares

Through the Wellbeing Plan, Caerphilly Public Services Board is committed to improving the well-being of all residents living in the County Borough. The Public Services Board recognises that currently, most services are delivered when residents are in need; at a crisis point. We need to shift this position to become more preventative in nature, so that problems are identified and addressed before individuals require intervention. Our commitment to Caerphilly Cares will do just that. The proposed Caerphilly Cares model is designed to build confidence and connect communities, improve resilience, wellbeing and reduce inequalities. It will help target resources and support, through people and community centred solutions, promoting independence and increasing people's control over their own lives. It is about mobilising assets within communities such as skills, knowledge and social networks so that individuals who share similar life experiences can support one another to create positive lasting change.

The long-term vision is for a much larger range of services to work collaboratively 'under the umbrella' of Caerphilly Cares to support early intervention and prevention, to meet the needs of all residents and support the most vulnerable. A single point of contact and streamlining responses through a universal gateway (a front door to services via a central coordination and response team) and triage service (a diagnostic service) underpins the offer.

Alongside social landlords, the Council will promote, participate, support and signpost residents through our day-to-day contact encompassing the Caerphilly Cares model into 'business as usual'. We will set out a 'programme of contact', identifying where and how we can engage residents and tenants into Caerphilly Cares; this may be when we provide advice and support for tenants in debt, when we visit a tenant in the private rented sector who has complained about the quality of their home or when we visit an owner who requires an adaptation to their home. We will make our contact with resident's count.

## Promoting Good Health Through Advice and Support

Alongside social landlords, The Council will better coordinate and integrate our current prevention services. Integrated prevention focuses not only on (individual) lifestyle factors, but also on the physical living environment and social problems, such as debt and stress. We and our social landlord partners will continue to deliver our programmes of support to tenants to create stronger relationships with communities, to build resilience. Our focus will be to build on the collaborative and partnership working to deliver excellent community management and maintenance through the Covid-19 pandemic to:

- support income maximisation, provide debt management support and budgeting advice
- maximise community groups to access community grant funding schemes.
- develop employment referral pathways, to offer customers training, qualifications and employability support
- align social landlord wellbeing calls and the Council's buddy scheme, sharing information and connecting people with longer term support through the community.
- Identify where sharing resources adds value to people lives.

## Driving Up Quality in The Private Sector

Tackling the determinants of poor health and wellbeing by improving housing conditions in the private sector is an objective in the Corporate Plan. Improving the quality of housing will reduce pressures on other public services, notably health and social care. For example, there is significant evidence showing links between cold, damp homes and respiratory disease and asthma.

This can be a particularly challenging agenda, Private Sector Housing accounts for about 80% of households in Caerphilly and the Council has a finite resource yet the outcomes can be significant. Private sector housing investment can make an important contribution to improving housing conditions, increasing independence, preventing homelessness, tackling fuel poverty, increasing housing supply, widening choice and creating sustainable communities.

Over the next 2-3 years, our Private Sector Housing interventions will grow, supported through interdepartmental working and an invest to save ethos. We will be establishing a cross specialism working group, with the specific tasks of creating housing led invest to save opportunities through jointly funding pilot initiatives that will tackle housing conditions and poor landlord practices to support better outcomes for people.

The work will build on our current investment that supports people living in the private sector to pay for improvements and adaptations to their homes. We offer a range of interest free loans and grants to make homes safe, warm and secure. We will continue our partnership with Care & Repair enabling vulnerable households to

receive additional assistance via a range of initiatives including the Rapid Response Adaptations Programme and Independent Living Grant.

## Supporting Energy Efficiency & Affordable Warmth

Earlier in our Local Housing Strategy we set out our commitment to being net carbon neutral by 2030 and the Decarbonisation Strategy for the County Borough sets out our priorities and plans. This has significant implications for the existing homes in Caerphilly.

The challenge for the Council is to ensure that existing homes can meet the ambitions of the decarbonisation strategy. Whilst it's possible to build a new home that is carbon neutral or carbon zero (where the house produces as much (or more) energy than it uses), it is far more difficult and expensive to do this on existing homes. Decarbonisation is the right thing to do. Low carbon and carbon zero retrofits focus on remodelling older homes to increase energy efficiency while producing renewable energy on-site to approach carbon neutrality. Alongside the benefits to climate change, this investment helps people heat homes more cheaply, eradicating fuel poverty and that directly helps support our physical – respiratory, rheumatic – and mental health – anxiety and depression. It promotes health and wellbeing.

We are maximising available funding from government and energy suppliers to undertake energy saving measures in both the private and public sector. We will provide advice to people about energy saving measures and help people to help themselves. This will work through the One Stop Shop public service offer which will take advice into the heart of communities and will sign-post residents to appropriate grant agencies to maximise take up. For example, we are promoting ECO, a government led energy efficiency initiative to help reduce carbon and tackle fuel poverty for the most vulnerable residents of the Caerphilly County Borough.

In Council owned homes, we are committed to delivering fabric first improvements considering a whole house retrofit approach where possible to reduce energy consumption and deliver cost savings for tenants. Building on the £261m spent to meet Welsh Housing Quality Standard, we anticipate investing a further £139m in Council homes, over the next 5 years, to maintain the housing stock, incorporating the decarbonisation agenda and maximising grant income.

With social landlords we will support tenants to improve the financial efficiency of heating their homes offering advice with a view to reduce household expenditure.

## A Caerphilly Home & Neighbourhood Health Index

The design of a home and community is a key contributor to the health and wellbeing of the people who live there. This includes factors such as daylight, temperature, air quality, internal layout and a wide range of neighbourhood factors such as the natural environment, amenities and public transport. Our requirement to build new homes provides both a challenge and an opportunity to ensure that we optimise health and wellbeing, as well as respond to the need for housing. We believe both quantity and quality are achievable.

Where the Council builds, we will take into account how new homes will support good health as well as creating great places and will encourage developers and social landlords to do the same. This will consider:

- the level of natural light.
- the size of homes (in terms of overall floor space not just rooms) and how layout supports social interaction.
- how standards of insulation impact on wellbeing and affordable warmth.
- how new developments support place and community.
- The level of sound and noise insulation to promote positive health and well-being.
- access to amenities.

For existing communities, we plan to introduce a healthy community sustainability index that supports the resilience agenda of Caerphilly Cares. This will be a checklist by which communities can be measured and improvement plans considered. They will consider walkability, access to green space and amenities, access to healthy shops etc. We will work with our social landlord partners through the Memorandum of Understanding to develop and implement this.

### Our Approach to Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-Social behaviour can have a devastating impact on people's lives, leaving them feeling helpless, desperate and hugely impact on their health and well-being. We understand these challenges and reflecting the increasing reporting and complexity of anti-social behaviour nationally and in Caerphilly, we have increased our resources to deal with it.

We are committed to working with other statutory and voluntary agencies to agree effective measures to prevent anti-social behaviour from occurring within our communities: to support vulnerable residents, to take firm and prompt action when anti-social behaviour occurs and when we can, rehabilitate perpetrators back within our communities.



## Delivering New Homes

We need to deliver more homes for people in Caerphilly so that both Caerphilly residents and newcomers can find a suitable, desirable home that they can afford. New homes will be delivered throughout communities, bringing an improved housing offer for everybody.

This can be difficult because there are challenges in our housing market such as poor ground conditions, areas with low sales values and natural factors such as topography and flood risk which means that some sites are harder to develop than others. We need to culturally redefine our mindset so that we find solutions, develop new models and deal with these challenges. We need to be more flexible in the interpretation of our policies, demonstrate consistency across our departments and promote a culture in favour of development that demonstrates that Caerphilly is 'open for business'.

## Developing a 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Local Development Plan

The supporting policy infrastructure, to enable more development to come forward, is the Local Development Plan (LDP) and by the end of 2024 we will have developed a 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Local Development Plan<sup>3</sup>. This will comprehensively set out the housing priorities across Caerphilly both in terms of numbers and spatial priorities and the supporting infrastructure that will be required including community facilities. The timing for the replacement LDP is set to work with the development of the National Development Framework (NDF)<sup>4</sup>, the 20-year land use framework for Wales which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) will need to align with and respond to.

We will use the process of developing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement LDP as an opportunity to work alongside social landlords and developers to identify new locations for housing, models for delivery and opportunities for funding. Our Local Housing Market Assessment will include information on the housing circumstances and aspirations of local people, which will help to inform future priorities.

As part of the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR), a Strategic Development Plan (SDP) will be prepared which joins up strategic planning for the region to provide an enabling tool for economic growth. A statutory SDP will provide certainty to developers, investors and communities that key strategic decisions around housing, transport, employment and infrastructure provision are being taken at a regional level, whilst still allowing key decisions on planning proposals to be taken locally.

In the period up to the adoption of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement LDP, the Council will continue to address the shortfall in housing delivery through proactive action, including:

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<sup>3</sup> The current adopted LDP will remain the development plan for the determining planning applications until it is replaced.

<sup>4</sup> <https://gov.wales/future-wales-national-plan-2040>

- working in partnership with social landlords and developers to bring sites forward for development.
- considering proposals for new residential development on a site-by-site basis and having due regard for the need to increase the delivery of housing;
- working with Welsh Government and the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) Deal to bid for funding for the redevelopment of sites with high infrastructure and/or remediation costs for housing;
- utilising a lease-based funding model to bring forward Council owned sites with viability issues;
- the identification of schemes where funding opportunities could be exploited to deliver regeneration projects, including for housing and employment;
- supporting the development of new build council housing on appropriate sites;

### Promoting that we are Open for Business

The Council has set up a Housing Stakeholder Group comprising representatives of the development industry and social landlords. The group is set up to ensure that housing completion figures are recorded correctly and to consider the timing and phasing of allocated LDP sites and sites with planning permission. The Group will also be involved in the preparation of a Housing Trajectory as an integral part of the 2nd Replacement LDP. We will be using the group to help us to develop an online resource for developers and social landlords to enable a better understanding of the housing development process and a more expedient way through. It will include the evidence of need, planning policies, delivery mechanisms, funding, land opportunities and key contacts at the Council.

### Identifying & Bringing New Sites Forward

We are committed to identifying and being more pro-active to bring sites forward for housing delivery. We will support sustainable development, retaining a brownfield first approach. Our priority will be to identify new sites where local people want to live and we will test whether the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced where people want to see new homes built. These sites will be included within the 2<sup>nd</sup> replacement LDP.

We will be undertaking a review of all Council owned or controlled land and estate, as part of the Team Caerphilly Strategy corporate review. This will significantly reduce the number of public facing assets it owns and by co-locating services with other public bodies, we can re-use those assets for housing.

We will work with landowners to identify potential land; but this will be more creative than a simple 'call for sites.' We will create sites, through purchase and demolition, employing Compulsory Purchase Orders where ownership of land is hampering growth. We will utilise the Governments Strategic Sites Acquisition Fund<sup>5</sup> and redesignate land use from employment to housing in town centres; through Council upfront investment, we can drive out value through development opportunities.

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<sup>5</sup> Covid Reconstruction – Challenges and Priorities

## Delivering More Affordable Housing

The delivery of modern, good quality truly affordable homes, for rent and sale, across the whole of the County Borough, will improve quality of life and create stronger and more cohesive communities. The barriers to delivering affordable housing mirror those of delivering market housing and we will explore all opportunities to increase the supply of affordable homes, maximising all available funding and explore different approaches such as utilising capital receipts from land sales to subsidise more difficult and lower value sites.

Our approach is driven by the recommendations of 'The independent Review of Affordable Housing Report'<sup>6</sup> that provided new opportunities to increase the supply and quality of affordable housing and enable local authorities to build. Our social landlord partners bring forward new opportunities to deliver affordable housing; their ambitions for growth are set out in their development strategies and we need to work more closely to support them to achieve their ambitions. We will be seeking to maximise funding for affordable housing and seek longer term certainty of funding to enable better forward planning.

The updated Local Housing Market Assessment will set out need, demand and aspirations and from this we will develop a revised prospectus for affordable housing, with social landlords, to support delivery and planning negotiations. It will set out evidence for both affordable rent and sale requirements and establish what is 'truly affordable' for local people. We know that there are some locations where there is a significant amount of affordable housing already such as in the Upper Rhymney Valleys and other locations where we would want to see increased provision such as the Northern Connections Corridor area and in the Caerphilly Basin area. The updated evidence base will review the affordable housing requirements based on both viability and current provision to help to achieve this.

Social landlords in Caerphilly have an excellent track record in delivering affordable housing for rent and sale. In driving forward this agenda, we want to strengthen our offer to social landlords to find solutions to deliver even more affordable housing. The Council has developed a Memorandum of Understanding with Linc Cymru, Pobl Group, United Welsh and Wales & West Housing Associations that secures closer partnering arrangements and sets out our shared commitment to work collaboratively. We see this as 'resetting our relationship' with social landlords, that will go beyond providing new homes and deliver wider benefits for social tenants in how homes are managed and the quality of service offered.

Caerphilly Homes is embarking on an ambitious new Council home building programme which will increase the number of homes that we own. We are developing a five-year development strategy that details our plans to build and acquire a new generation of homes that meet a growing local need for new social and affordable housing. The Caerphilly Homes *Building Together* programme commits to delivering 400 new affordable homes over the lifetime of this strategy. We are adopting a range of models that will see us deliver directly on Council owned land, acquire sites from the open market, acquire homes via s106 development, buy

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<sup>6</sup> <https://gov.wales/independent-review-affordable-housing-supply-report>

homes on the existing market and buy empty homes. We also want to collaborate with our housing association partners to identify shared opportunities for developing new homes.

## The Council as Investor & Partner in Housing Delivery

We are serious about accelerating housing growth. During the lifetime of our Local Housing Strategy, we will be testing new tools in partnership with developers and social landlords that will speed up delivery of the type of housing that Caerphilly County Borough needs.

A significant change will be our role as investor in the housing market. We are already committed to building new affordable homes and will develop models that will see us invest in market housing. We are currently piloting a lease model as an alternative form of housing delivery which enables both the Council and developer, to bring challenging sites forward and share risk and profit. Working on a deferred capital receipt approach, the model delivers s106 affordable homes in line with policy requirements and other models with similar outcomes will be explored.

The Council has been successful in accessing funding to unlock strategic sites. This often focuses on larger sites and the council wants to explore how it may use alternative funding such as commuted sums to secure its wider objectives of delivering more affordable homes, helping people to access affordable home ownership and supporting people to access specialist and supported housing. Over the lifetime of this strategy, the Council will undertake an options appraisal of how it may utilise different council sources of funding to invest in housing and secure a return that will support reinvestment, creating a revolving fund overtime.

## New Models of Delivery

Community led housing is very much supported in the County Borough and can offer a wide range of benefits in terms of affordability, quality and density, community engagement and training opportunities. We recognise the benefits of the custom and self-build sector in diversifying the housing stock and will identify a list of small sites that would be suitable for this use, which will help facilitate local people building their own homes within their communities.

## Bringing Empty Homes Back into Use

We will be bringing empty homes back into use to increase the supply of housing and extend choice, improve housing conditions and meet housing need. We are piloting a dedicated empty homes team underpinned by a new Empty Homes Strategy and Action Plan that will focus on new tools to bring empty homes back into use. We have over £2m available for loans to support owners to bring empty homes back into use. We will explore a range of alternative models such as lease and repair, repair and sale models and a web-based presence will be developed to provide advice and support to owners and landlords.

The Council has begun a programme of identifying former Council owned properties which were sold under the right to buy process and acquiring them utilising government grant, to bring them back into use as social housing, helping the Council to meet housing need.

### Creating New Jobs & Economic Opportunity

We have a successful track record in delivering training and employment through the construction sector and this Strategy will capitalise on those opportunities. We want to support local businesses, create local jobs and ensure that we maximise our 'Caerphilly pound'.

The Cardiff Capital Region partnership will further promote this agenda. It will engage the affordable housing providers in the region, as one network, that will develop a regional "Housing Plus" strategy in which added value benefits such as training, construction, apprenticeships, energy resilience and job creation are clearly set out and adopted.

## Supporting Specialist Housing Needs

The outcome of our Local Housing Strategy is to provide a better housing offer in Caerphilly, but our focus is about people. Whether we are building new affordable homes, creating options for first time buyers or developing move on accommodation for people leaving care, we are always looking to provide people centred solutions that improve people's lives, develop innovative approaches, and live up to our values of 'doing things differently'.

The Covid-19 pandemic has proved itself to be a societal disruption unprecedented in modern times. The public health response has not only encompassed specific measures for the physical protection of the population from the virus but increasingly has focused on supporting and protecting the mental health of the population; it is evident that the impact of the pandemic and subsequent response has been experienced very differently by different groups in society and has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. Our Strategy will respond as the longer term legacy of Covid-19 becomes clearer but we know it has led to an increased number of people who are sleeping rough and people requiring temporary accommodation; this has significantly increased the pressure to find suitable accommodation.

Caerphilly has good quality supported accommodation units and through this Strategy we will take action to ensure that we can support those with more complex needs, providing both the right support and accommodation pathways. Our priority is to promote sustainable communities and tenancies and our primary focus is to ensure we have the correct supporting people services available to enable people to either live independently within their homes or where this is not possible, in supported accommodation that is 'inclusive for all' and meets their primary support need; and when people are ready to move on, they will be supported to successfully achieve this.

In developing solutions, we want to:

- provide the right support, for the right person, at the right time and reduce the use of residential care and inappropriate admissions to hospital. People want and deserve their own front door and we will promote accessibility in all new build homes.
- work closely with our partners to support people to remain living in Caerphilly
- ensure that people live independently in their home and interdependently within their neighbourhoods.
- create choices about where people want to live, how they live and whether they rent or own their property.

We know the amazing role that many family carers offer, and we are planning to increase the availability of respite care for family-based carers by offering more day support placements through the development of a new purpose-built Respite Centre facility at Pontllanfraith with the potential to deliver respite services from a single location for the whole of the County Borough.

## Develop a Specialist Accommodation Prospectus

A full needs assessment will be undertaken to develop a baseline position for individuals requiring specialist accommodation.

The evidence base will involve stakeholders including service providers, service users and officers to set out the aspiration and vision for accommodation, models of support and tenures and location. This will then be formalised into a specialist accommodation prospectus that focuses on:

- maximising the number of people with a specialist need living in their own home with whom they choose to live with, and
- expanding the range and choice of housing, care and support services providing more choice and control over their lives.
- setting out the partners that need to engage with this agenda and plan to achieve this such as housing Support Services and Private Landlords.

The prospectus will be used to engage with the market and commission new accommodation.

## Accommodation Review

The evidence base of need will enable us to undertake an accommodation assessment review approached from an 'invest to save' model to define the most appropriate use of our existing accommodation. Options may include remodelling and decommissioning, and new schemes may be commissioned.

An Accommodation Options Group will be established to create individual pathways for people that require specialist accommodation. For example, it will work alongside looked after children from an earlier age, planning and commissioning accommodation. By referring earlier in the process, properties can be found for individuals or potentially delivered through the planning system. This may also be through Caerphilly Keys, with appropriate tenancy support.

## Develop a Longer-Term Delivery Strategy

We will work with social landlords and market providers to strengthen our evidence about the type of specialist accommodation required in Caerphilly and set out funding and delivery models for move on accommodation and to develop better supported housing schemes including:

- clusters of units in individual locations for individuals with learning disabilities and mental health challenges.
- high quality, professionally managed co-living schemes with individual kitchens and bathrooms but some communal space to manage private and shared living.
- purpose-based flats with support and training for individuals using substances and alcohol.
- individual 1 bed move on accommodation pepper potted throughout the County Borough.
- opportunities for home ownership for people with long term disabilities.

## Supporting People Who Are Homeless & Rough Sleeping

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a stark reminder of the urgency of reversing rising rates of homelessness and rough sleeping. Preventing homelessness and tackling rough sleeping brings the resources of the Council, social landlords and support partners together to deliver a 'Housing First' approach securing permanent self-contained accommodation with flexible, intensive community support offered around the needs of the person.

During the Covid Pandemic, we supported almost 1,000 people into emergency temporary accommodation and more continue to be supported each day. Many people who have previously been unable to engage with services are now benefiting from support and advice including mental health support and substance use treatment, laying the foundations for a permanent exit from homelessness. We must now turn to planning for the future and helping people into more permanent housing.

Our focus will be to move away from a reliance on unsuitable temporary accommodation and towards a rapid rehousing approach, supported by Welsh Government. Rapid Rehousing moves people into settled, secure and suitable homes as quickly as possible as the default solution when homelessness cannot be prevented.

It calls for prevention to be targeted at certain groups proven to be at greater risk, such as vulnerable young people and people leaving care or prison. It also wants the legal duty to prevent homelessness to be extended across the wider public sector, not just placed at the door of housing services. The initial focus will be on the development of a move on protocol for re-housing those in emergency/temporary accommodation into more suitable permanent accommodation. We will develop a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan setting out how our service will move toward a Rapid Rehousing approach. We will:

- Carefully review our evidence to identify anticipated demand for services both now and over the next five years
- Identify the scale of need for permanent housing and the complexity of that need and include plans in our new build development programmes where possible.
- Consider the likely location and type of accommodation and support required
- Map the quantity, quality and location of temporary housing across the county Borough

### Identify the Resources We Will Require

Our priorities are to:

- acknowledge and plan for the impact of Covid-19 on homelessness and the increased demand on services now and in the future as the economy provides an unstable platform for economic growth and we will work with social landlords and other stakeholders to create solutions.



- prevent people from becoming homeless by ensuring that information on housing options is easily accessible, supporting residents facing eviction so that they can remain in their existing homes and using data analysis to target our interventions at resident groups at highest risk of homelessness.
- support those experiencing the crisis of homelessness, to regain their independence and by working in partnership with social landlords, voluntary and community partners to make the best use of resources.
- take trauma and psychologically informed approaches to improve services for vulnerable people.
- plan for accessible accommodation requirements for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- tackle the root causes of homelessness by providing rough sleepers with a “route off the street”, working with landlords to find more homes and using our existing social housing assets more effectively.

### Improving Service Delivery

We are planning to review how we make initial assessments on our responsibilities for homeless households so that we can respond more effectively. We are planning to review how we make assessments and decisions at an earlier stage about what the Council’s duty is which will enable us to assess people’s requirements more quickly and allow the Council to focus on more preventative support by signposting people to advice and assistance where that is required and focusing our resources on those people who need to be offered accommodation.

### Tackling Rough Sleeping & Sofa Surfing

Rough sleeping is an issue that we are looking to tackle. While 6 rough sleepers were identified on the last count, it is likely that the true numbers are closer to 20-30, hidden due to our rural nature. There are a number of clients with very extensive needs, often rough sleeping because the current mechanisms and services have fallen short of their needs. By increasing our evidence on what contributes to the root cause of rough sleeping we will develop and delivering viable solutions that provide support and accommodation.

Whilst rough sleeping is a priority area for the Council, so too is sofa surfing. Better intelligence is needed to understand the extent of sofa surfing across the County Borough. We will explore the scale and potential options to support and reduce sofa surfing, as well the demand for Housing Related Support Provision and identify gaps in supply. There may be a potential action around undertaking a more detailed needs analysis in the future to understand the demand and need for housing related support.

### Increasing Provision of Accommodation

We will explore and increase the opportunities that the Private Rented Sector can offer to provide solutions for people who in housing need. We are planning to consult with landlords to understand what their challenges and barriers are in providing accommodation to households who are homeless or at risk and we will be

developing options that incentivise landlords to work with the Council so that we are able to effectively discharge our duty into the PRS sector. This may include the local authority acting as guarantor for tenancies, developing a more attractive landlord offer such as rent payments in advance and support if homes are improved and then offered for rent through Caerphilly Homes.

A significant role for the Council is to expand the scale of Caerphilly Keys, a project led by the Housing Solutions team which helps private landlords find long term tenants for their properties, whilst also preventing homelessness. The service is provided free of charge to landlords.

Through our social landlords and Caerphilly homes, the Council will secure additional units in the private rented sector, creating a network of dispersed housing allowing for greater independence to provide permanent housing solutions for people.

### The Need for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Sites

The last Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, identified no requirement for a permanent site – the known population in the County Borough is low and need has previously been on a temporary basis where groups are passing through Caerphilly. The Council will keep this decision under close review and will supplement the current evidence base by proactively attempting to carry out accommodation needs surveys on all unauthorised encampments that take place in the County Borough. The Council is currently in the process of carrying out a new Assessment, which will be completed in early 2022.

The replacement LDP will continue to include a criteria-based policy to address any applications for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller sites.