

North Wales Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group

ANNUAL STATEMENT

2022-23

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Welcome to the North Wales Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group's (RHSCG) Annual Statement outlining our goals for the next twelve months. This statement addresses the progression made against 2021-22's work plan.

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

Local authorities are governed by the Housing Support Grant Guidance, updated in March 2021, and chapter five outlines the role of the RHSCG as followed:

What is a RHSCG?

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

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

Annually each RHSCG across Wales is expected to submit an annual statement outlining their objectives. This is our annual plan for 2022-23.

Where can I find the Guidance for the HSG?

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

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

What is HSG?

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

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

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

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

The North Wales HSG allocation

The Housing Support Grant for Wales was allocated an additional 40million pounds for the financial year 2021-22, following a bid by officials in Welsh Government. This increase to the 2021-22 HSG budget was in recognition of the investment that is needed to end homelessness, with the additional funding coming from the Welsh Government’s core budget, rather than from a Covid-19 related budget.

The grant allocation for 2022-23 has been awarded with the same amount as 2021-22 with a confirmation that the following two years have been confirmed by Welsh Government that this will be the grant allocation for 2023-24 and 2024-25.

The table below shows how significant the increase was to each local authority’s allocation:

Local Authority	HSG Allocation for this year 2022-23	HSG Allocation prior to uplift in 2020-21
Anglesey	£3,571,720.50	£2,714,998
Gwynedd	£6,802,616.45	£5,170,923
Conwy	£8,645,095.79	£6,571,460
Denbighshire	£7,356,535.02	£5,591,976
Flintshire	£7,828,610.00	£5,950,818
Wrexham	£6,721,499.09	£5,109,262
North Wales	£40,926,076.85	£31,109,437

Furthermore to the allocation being kept at these levels for the next 2 years, Welsh Government have also had engagement events in October 2021 on plans to align local/regional projects funded by the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) with the Housing Support Grant (HSG), the Minister for Climate Change did agree to start transferring funding and administration of these projects to the HSG from 2022-23.

The main features of the changes to the HSG and associated timescales, are the 'Main Programme' projects totalling £2.44m across Wales that will transfer to the Housing Support Grant from 2022-23, and will be ring-fenced for a transitional period of up to two years.

After the two year transition period, the totality of funding for these HPG 'main programme' projects, £2.44m, will be redistributed to LAs using the current HSG distribution formula. Welsh Government have stated this is to allow sufficient time for authorities to plan – through dialogue with project providers – for how and whether they will fund 'main programme' projects beyond the transition period.

This could have huge implications for some Providers across North Wales as well as those who use these services. People who access some of these services do not generally access local authority services in the first instance. This will be kept on the agenda for the RHSCG to discuss the implications of the changes of this grant.

There were however no updates on **redistribution** during 2021 or to date, therefore authorities continue to have the uncertainty of this looming and the following section remains in this statement to continue to share the amount North Wales could face to lose.

Redistribution:

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

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

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

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

Local Authority	HSG Allocation for 2022-23	% increase / decrease proposed in March 2020	What this % will look like to the allocation
Anglesey	£3,571,720.50	Plus 6.2%	£3,793,167.17
Gwynedd	£6,802,616.45	Down 9.6%	£6,149,565.27
Conwy	£8,645,095.79	Down 21.2%	£6,812,335.49
Denbighshire	£7,356,535.02	Down 15.8%	£6,194,202.49
Flintshire	£7,828,610.00	Down 4.3%	£7,491,980.00
Wrexham	£6,721,499.09	Down 5.5%	£6,351,816.65
North Wales	£40,926,076.85		£36,793,067.07 Reduction of £4,133,009.78 (includes Anglesey's increase)

Whilst the additional funding is much needed and welcoming, subsequently, the looming threat of redistribution at a time where we still don't know the true impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and more recently how much assistance is required to accommodate Ukrainian refugees; it is concerning for authorities to be able to plan; and plan where **limited** accommodation is available.

The North Wales RHSCG

The North Wales RHSCG is made up of members from each local authority, Providers and Landlord representatives, Probation, OPCC, Mental Health, Substance Misuse Area Planning Board, VAWDASV representative, and a National Residential Landlords Association representative. Details of who these members are can be found in appendix one.

Collaboration with other Partnerships

For regional working to be successful, the RHSCG will need to ensure links are made where a housing support is an element of another regional agenda. We have listed boards with a housing cross over below.

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

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The next twelve months we will focus on committing to enhance and explore potential collaboration with the above mentioned boards particularly the Regional Partnership Board and Public Service Boards.

The RHSCG is satisfied with the links made with the Vulnerability and Exploitation Board which has a member from the RHSCG and the chair of the North Wales HSG Leads meeting chairs the VAWDASV Commissioning group. Last year we raised there were gaps for a dual diagnosis domestic abuse refuge for women with mental health and substance misuse issues and this has been progressed by the VAWDASV Commissioning group and projects have since been set up in a North Wales local authority.

The RHSCG will contribute for another year for the jointly commissioned Independent Domestic Violence Advisors with VAWDASV Commissioning Group and OPCC funding. Another years funding has also been committed for target hardening Equipment.

The RHSCG has strong working links with the North Wales Area Planning Board for Substance Misuse (APB). The RHSCG continues to contribute to the Collaborative Outreach Services which is a regional project commissioned jointly with the APB.

Additionally, priorities the RHSCG will be taking forward in 2022/23 the APB can help advance. The APB developed a co-occurring mental health agenda which will assist firming links with this agenda. The APB has commissioned Learning Events for prevention and reducing harm. Prevention and early intervention is a key priority for the RHSCG for 2022/23.

RHSCG Achievements in 2021-22: Review of last year's priorities:

Last year we agreed the below objectives as the priorities for the RHSCG. Each authority transferred a percentage of their grant to a regional pot for the development of the following:

- Commission LGBTQ+ Training for both Providers and HSG teams
- Commission a bespoke Mental Health and Housing Training
- Commission a regional hoarding project
- Commission Advanced Homelessness Law Training
- Explore commissioning options for a Dual diagnosis domestic abuse refuge for women with mental health and substance misuse issues
- Post pandemic emerging issues

- Explore the commissioning options for increasing provision available for the LGBTQ+ community
- Explore a regional dispersed unit / refuge for male survivors / fleeing domestic abuse
- PIE (Psychological Informed Environments) – embedding this into our services

In 2021/22 the following priorities have been commissioned from the regional funded pot:

- ✓ LGBTQ+ Training
- ✓ Bespoke Mental Health and Housing Training
- ✓ Regional hoarding project
- ✓ Advanced Homelessness Law Training

The following table outlines progression made against each priority area from 2021/22's plan.

LGBTQ+ Training	<p>This was identified as a need across the region to broaden understanding and awareness to ensure officers are confident to support people that identify as LGBTQ+. The training was available to both HSG and Homeless local authority staff and external providers.</p> <p>Training was commissioned via Denbighshire's young people project in Rhyl with Viva. Further dates were added and paid for due to popularity and feedback of this training.</p> <p>A review of the training and evaluation forms from the Trainer are due May 2022.</p>
Mental Health and Housing Training	<p>Expressions of interest went out to providers in August 2021, the contract was awarded to Hafan Cymru. The first training dates started in November 2021 with dates up until April 2022.</p> <p>This was booked for 300 participants and was aimed specifically for local authority housing officers, housing options staff, tenancy support and welfare officers.</p> <p>Once all dates have been completed, a review of the training and evaluation forms will be completed and the possibility of additional dates to widen this training out to providers in 2022/23 will be explored.</p>
Regional hoarding project	<p>The HSG officers have collaborated with the North Wales Regional Hoarding Group to initiate a regional project that will include a coordinator post and hoarding officers to provide consistency with approach across the region and a dedicated team to support those who hoard.</p> <p>Work has commenced and hope to have people recruited by Summer 2022.</p>
Dual diagnosis domestic abuse refuge	<p>The RHSCG raised this as a gap in provision and shared the feedback we had received on lack of provision when compiling last year's RHSCG work plan with the Vulnerability and Exploitation Board. The Vulnerability and</p>

	<p>Exploitation Board were awarded capital funding specifically for dispersed units.</p> <p>Following an expression of interest exercise 3 dispersed units were awarded to two Providers in Conwy, and support will be funded by HSG in Conwy.</p> <p>All 3 units are now available for occupation.</p>
Post pandemic emerging issues	<p>The North Wales Regional Homelessness Strategy 2018-22 Group commissioned an external researcher to assess the current homelessness needs from the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The researcher interviewed local authority housing colleagues, providers and external providers and service users receiving housing support grant services.</p> <p>The report presented many key themes for authorities to consider for their four yearly strategies and the themes from the report were used as a basis for consulting with Providers and Service Users for the wider consultation of the local authorities Housing Support Grant strategies.</p>
Advanced Homelessness Law Training	<p>Shelter Cymru have been commissioned to provide the Advanced Homelessness Law training. This has been made available regionally to statutory team members in each authority. Dates in the diary of April and May 2022.</p>

Priorities outstanding from 2021:

- Explore the commissioning options for increasing provision available for the LGBTQ+ community
- Explore a regional dispersed unit / refuge for male survivors / fleeing domestic abuse
- PIE (Psychological Informed Environments) – embedding this into our services

Work has commenced on the above; and will continue to form part of the priorities for 2022/23. A work plan will be available at each RHSCG meeting updating on progress this can be obtained from the Regional Development Coordinator. Contact details in appendix one.

Objectives for 2022-23

For the next twelve months, the RHSCG has identified regional priorities for its work plan against the HSG guidance categories on regional working:

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

The RHSCG regional priority areas for 2022-23

Cat 1: Development of specialist services

Our North Wales service user feedback questionnaire and the local authorities HSG housing needs assessment data will highlight gaps in service provision.

Through the VAWDASV Commissioning Board the following will be raised as a priority of the RHSCG and a current gap in HSG service provision for the Vulnerability and Exploitation Board to work collaboratively with the HSG grant for:

VAWDASV:

- Explore regional dispersed unit / refuge for male survivors of domestic abuse
- Explore specialist refuge for dual diagnosis (Mental Health and Substance Misuse)
- Explore supported Housing specific for survivors of domestic abuse, to be disaggregated and separated from traditional provision of domestic abuse type services.
- Explore how we can access more funding for domestic abuse perpetrator schemes.
- Need for more safe houses for victims of domestic abuse, as an alternative to refuges, and safe house provision to accommodate disabilities.

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

Continuation of regionally funded projects:

The RHSCG will continue to contribute to the Collaborative Outreach Services. This is a regional project commissioned jointly with the area planning board for the North Wales.

The RHSCG will contribute for another year for the jointly commissioned Independent Domestic Violence Advisors with VAWDASV and OPCC funding. Another years funding has also been committed for target hardening Equipment.

LGBTQ+ Provision:

The RHSCG will finalise exploring the need to increase LGBTQ+ provision across North Wales. A data analysis will be completed and service user feedback will be undertaken to illustrate demand.

Cat 3: Delivery of improvements to be achieved by collaboration

The RHSCG will continue to build links where a housing support is an element of another regional agenda and ensure there is collaboration and partnership working at a regional level to deliver improvements to services. Each local authority will be submitting a Rapid Rehousing Action Plan in June 2022, the RHSCG recognises there will be commonalities across the region where together an action under the Rapid Rehousing Plans can be progressed collaboratively.

Early intervention:

The HSG leads will be exploring for the RHSCG how we can ensure services are operating a psychologically informed environment approach. This is essentially a culture shift we are prioritising to embed trauma informed provision. The HSG leads will revisit discussions already taken place with the All Wales ACE Hub; previous discussions have been for two local authorities to pilot this project; this will be revisited in 2022/23.

Workforce Development:

Workforce development will be at the forefront of the RHSCG as we enter into the new financial year. The RHSCG will explore commissioning online roadshows to promote the sector, work collaboratively to seek ways to boost the recruitment sector within HSG.

It is essential for the RHSCG to prioritise the staff we have now, the RHSCG has gathered best practice from authorities and will continue to have as an agenda item to gather ideas from across the region and different sectors RHSCG members represent.

Renting Homes Wales Act 2022:

The implementation of the new Renting Homes Wales Act from 15th July 2022 will affect social and private landlords and tenants. To ensure the transition to be as smooth as possible for the Housing sector; the Housing Support Grant leads have commissioned training that is bespoke. This will include delivery of two training programmes, an overview that is tailored to housing and a specialist training package to assist with this transition. This has been commissioned regionally.

Cat 4: Collaboration with other public services.

The RHSCG will continue to improve links with the RPB and other regional boards / partnerships where there is a housing linkage / agenda.

Mental Health:

Strengthening links with Mental Health services has historically been an area to improve, HSG funded services are predominantly dealing with complex people with multiple presenting mental health needs where the linkage with Mental Health is required to assist this isn't always available and puts immense pressure on staff and the persons overall mental health and wellbeing.

A future RHSCG meeting will be dedicated to this agenda to tackle what the gaps and needs are to enhance partnership working, with the service users at the centre of this priority.

The previous bespoke Mental Health and Housing Training that was commissioned, will also be discussed as to whether this can be funded to provide training to Providers across North Wales, as initially this was local authority training to HSG and Housing teams.

Future standard agenda items at the RHSCG will include the following:

- Updates against this Annual Statement work plan (appendix two)
- Updates on the Homeless Prevention Grant and lack of funding to projects across the region
- Rapid Rehousing
- Renting Homes Wales Act
- Workforce Development
- Ukraine Resettlement
- Service User Input

As previously mentioned the Redistribution funding formula on the HSG grant will continue as a priority within our work plan, a communication plan has been agreed at RHSCG and will be shared once an announcement is shared by Welsh Government.

The RHSCG will continue to have Rapid Rehousing as a standard agenda item going forward. It is crucial we use this platform to share the regions journey in progressing towards each authorities Rapid Rehousing Plans due June 2022.

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

Appendix One – Membership of the RHSCG

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

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	Conwy	Debbie Lambe
	Denbighshire	Claire Owens
	Flintshire	Lisa Pearson
	Wrexham	Debbie Williams
Regional Development Coordinator (RDC)	North Wales RDC	Rachel Pierce-Jones Rachel.pierce-jones3@conwy.gov.uk 01492 574234