

**CARTREF YW POPETH
HOME IS EVERYTHING**



Making Multi-Agency Support at the Pearl House Hub a Success: Views and Recommendations from Service Users and Frontline Staff

**A Shelter Cymru Project funded by Torfaen
County Borough Council**

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Who are Shelter Cymru?

Shelter Cymru are a registered charity dedicated to supporting the right to a safe home in Wales. We campaign on Welsh housing issues with a view to influencing positive change. Our vision is that a decent, secure home is a fundamental right and essential to the health and well-being of communities

We help thousands of people each year across Wales who are affected by the housing emergency by offering free, confidential and independent advice. When necessary, we constructively challenge on behalf of people to ensure they are properly assisted and to improve practice and learning.

We work with people who use our services as equals. We provide information, advice and support to help people identify the best options to prevent homelessness, to find and keep a home and to help them take control of their own lives.

We exist to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society.

We do this with campaigns, advice and support – and we never give up.

We believe that home is everything.

Contents

1. Introduction and Research Background	4
2. Methodology	5
3. Building a Successful Multi-Agency Hub Model: Key Considerations .	5
4. Results.....	8
4.1. Online survey	8
4.2. Workshop event.....	11
5. Discussion	15
5.1. The Space.....	16
5.2. The Staff	20
5.3. The System.....	24
5.4. Service User Involvement	29
6 Conclusion	34
7. Recommendations	36
7.1 The Space.....	36
7.2 The Staff	36
7.3 The System	37
7.4 Service User Involvement	37

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1. Introduction and Research Background

Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) commissioned and funded this research to inform their plans for a new Advice, Accommodation and Support Hub, based in the Pearl House building in Pontypool. The service specification was drafted prior to this research, and the tender process to select a service provider to manage the project began during the data collection phase. The purpose of this research is to draw on the views of people with lived experience of accessing housing support, alongside the views of professionals working for partners in housing support and complementary sectors, to establish how the project could be best delivered to serve people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Torfaen.

TCBC are repurposing part of the Pearl House building to make it the location of an open-access advice and support hub ('the Hub') for people with a housing support need, as well as 15 supported accommodation units (offered for up to 6 months). There will be space available in the Hub (both in-person and virtually) for representatives from partner organisations; this could be Council or third sector housing staff or professionals from other sectors such as probation, mental health services, substance misuse support or local community connectors. One of the Hub's aims is to strengthen partnership working to better meet the needs of service users with a housing concern. A summary of the service specification can be found in Appendix A or the full document can be accessed by request from TCBC.

This new project is part of the Council's aim to meet the vision of their Housing Support Grant Programme that:

"Everyone who lives in Torfaen has a home that meets their needs and the necessary support and assistance to lead a fulfilling life."

The principles of the service are in line with key areas of Welsh Government strategy, namely strengthening collaborative working, using a flexible and person-centred approach and striving to prevent homelessness and ensure it is brief and unrepeatable when unpreventable.

The Pearl House project will be joining an existing network of commissioned third sector housing support and the provision provided directly by the local authority. Locally there are drop-in services managed by The Wallich and Platform, both of which are able to complete homelessness assessments and refer into the local authority's Gateway system for additional housing support. There are a number of commissioned supported accommodation options in the area, with staffing levels relative to the needs of residents, alongside different provisions of floating or outreach support based on service users' presenting secondary needs (e.g. mental health informed housing support provided by Platform, housing support for people with an offending history offered by The Wallich or Llamau's housing support for young people). The referral process and allocations are managed centrally by local authority staff.

While the aims and location of the Pearl House project had been agreed, TCBC tasked Shelter Cymru with gathering feedback from the local community on the development and delivery of the Pearl House project, with a focus on the Hub element. This feedback will inform the ongoing support that the Council provide to the project and the decisions that the commissioned service provider will take in planning and delivery.

2. Methodology

Data collection for this research took place between July and November 2023. The project was guided by a collaborative steering group consisting of Shelter Cymru staff, Peer Researchers and TCBC. Shelter Cymru's Peer Researchers have lived experience of the housing emergency in Wales and use these experiences alongside their research skills to inform our work.

The research took a mixed methods approach to better understand both the experiences of residents in Torfaen who have accessed housing-related support and the hopes and expectations of the Pearl House Hub from service users and professionals locally.

The three-phased approach involved:

- A survey, using an adapted version of Shelter Cymru's [Equal Ground Measure](#), to gather service users' experiences of navigating the existing support provision in Torfaen. This was completed online, in interview with Shelter Cymru researchers or with the support of third sector staff;
- A workshop facilitated by Shelter Cymru researchers and Peer Researchers to introduce initial plans for the Pearl House Hub and collect feedback from relevant professionals and service users;
- A series of follow-up semi-structured interviews with key partner organisations conducted by Peer Researchers with support from Shelter Cymru researchers.

The research team also conducted a brief literature review of best practice in certain key areas relating to building a successful multi-agency hub model: Trauma-Informed Practice; Partnership Working; Sharing Information; Co-Production.

The data collection from local voices and the best practice guidance have collectively formed the recommendations of this report to create a response that is unique to Torfaen and its residents.

3. Building a Successful Multi-Agency Hub Model: Key Considerations

The focus of our literature review was defined during the data collection phase, based on key areas for consideration that arose during discussions with various stakeholders. The following outlines established principles in these areas. While some of these are touched upon in the service specification document, some expansion was considered beneficial to inform our recommendations.

3.1 Ensuring practice is trauma-informed

Trauma-informed practice means being sensitive to the trauma that service users may have experienced, actively seeking to prevent re-traumatisation, and striving to improve the health and wellbeing of those affected.

It is likely that clients accessing the Hub have experienced and/or are experiencing trauma.

The [Trauma-Informed Wales Framework](#) sets out five Practice Principles:

- A universal approach that does no harm

- Person-centred
- Relationship-focused
- Resilience and strengths-focused
- Inclusive

Establishing a trauma-Informed system at the Hub would ensure that it operates in a trauma-informed way. Features of this include:

- Minimising silo working
- Reducing bureaucratic processes
- Promoting collaboration and power sharing
- Ensuring people are safe to seek help and emotional support
- Identifying processes that positively impact on wellbeing

3.2 Ensuring best practice in partnership working

A large part of the success of the Hub will rest on the ability of all partners to value and promote collaboration. Several key principles will support this:

- Establish roles and responsibilities early on
- Communicate effectively and regularly
- Develop a clear joint vision
- Recognise and value areas of expertise
- Be realistic about capacity
- Promote flexibility and mutual support
- Focus on the shared goal

3.3 Developing an ethos of co-production

Co-production occurs when professionals work in partnership with people who have lived experience, to develop solutions to challenges in public services and communities.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has produced a set of principles for co-production that are useful to consider:

Equality	Co-production starts from the idea that no one group or person is more important than anyone else
Diversity	Co-production should be as inclusive and diverse as possible. Particular efforts may be needed to make sure seldom heard groups are included.
Accessibility	Making everything accessible is the way to make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to participate fully in an activity in the way that suits them best.
Reciprocity	Reciprocity means people get something back for putting something in. This reciprocity can come from the more equal relationships that develop between people and organisations.

Co-production principles can benefit services even when those services were not co-designed with service users. The Wallich's *Reflect to Perfect* project is a clear example of this. The Wallich recruited a team of "Client Assessors" from people with lived experience of accessing their support services and together they co-designed a new set of service standards for the organisation. The team then led on a wider service user engagement phase across the organisation and have helped to pinpoint services that need additional support to meet the new organisational standards.

The benefits to those involved included increased confidence, building new skills and even gaining paid employment. For The Wallich, this work has transformed their Quality Assurance process, it has improved their documentation, and shifted the culture of the organisation ([PHW and Co-Production Wales](#) 2018).

The [Co-production Network for Wales](#) provides a wide range of resources and training to support organisations in developing an ethos and practice of co-production.

3.4 Sharing information

The Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) provides a clear framework which promotes the management and efficient sharing of information. Using the WASPI Framework to build bespoke Information Sharing Protocols (ISPs) for new and existing collaborations has been shown to create benefits for both the organisations involved and the clients that these partnerships serve.

Broadly, the WASPI framework aims to break down barriers to information sharing by helping partnerships navigate legal complexities around data protection and giving staff confidence about when and how they can appropriately share information. This can prevent service users from having to repeat information and allows providers to provide a holistic, wrap-around service.

Torfaen's own Flying Start programme is raised as a good practice example of the use of the WASPI framework ([Welsh Government](#) 2019). It was noted that benefits were seen as soon as the ISP agreement process began as the agencies involved gained a better understanding of the requirements and offers of their partners. Prior to this, information sharing took place bilaterally and slowly through a series of clearance processes. The creation of an ISP was found to increase staff confidence, ensure timely sharing of information, and make information sharing more inclusive across the partnership.

The [WASPI](#) website has a wealth of resources and guidance.

4. Results

The results of the first two phases of data collection – the online survey and workshop event – are summarised here. The third phase of data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews which enabled researchers to drill down into some of the findings from the first two phases. This data is used to inform key areas of focus and recommendations in the discussion section of this report.

4.1 Online survey

The first phase of this research engaged with current service users in Torfaen to understand their experiences of existing support structures. 13 individuals completed a survey based on Shelter Cymru's [Equal Ground Measure](#) in conversation with Shelter Cymru staff or with the support of known third sector staff.

Of those who took part in the survey, there was a slight skew towards a younger demographic. 60% of respondents were aged 18-25, 30% in the 26-54 bracket, and 10% were over 55. This is not reflective of the wider picture locally where only 16% of those provided homelessness assistance are under 25 years old ([StatsWales](#) 2023).

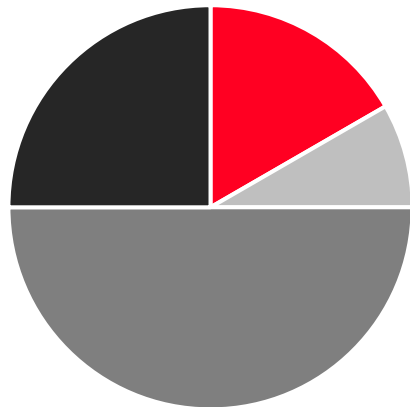
Almost 70% of survey respondents declared that they have an enduring physical or mental health condition. The remaining 30% opted to not respond to that question so the actual percentage may be higher. This echoes pan-Wales research by Public Health Wales that shows people with experience of homelessness present with higher rates of mental and physical health concerns than the general population ([PHW](#) 2021).

A notable majority of respondents were White British (77%) with all other respondents preferring not to answer this demographic question. 97.1% of people in Torfaen identified as "White" in recent survey data ([ONS](#) 2021).

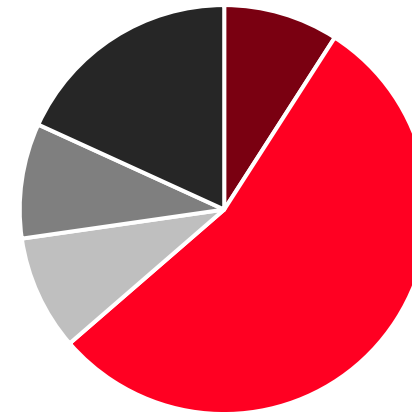
As such, our participant pool can be considered broadly reflective of the demographics present in the housing support services user group in Torfaen but consideration must be given to the differing age demographic of participants in this research.

The survey began with a series of statements and asked respondents to choose an option on a 5-point scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Figures 1-4 present this data.

(Fig.1) I was confident about where to go to access housing-related support.



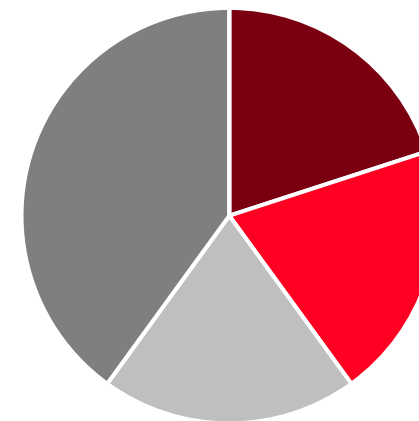
(Fig.3) I was connected to other support that was appropriate for me.



(Fig.2) The local authority contacted me when they said they would and I was kept informed of my case.



(Fig.4) After receiving housing-related support from the local authority, I felt that I was unlikely to be at risk of homelessness for at least the next six months.

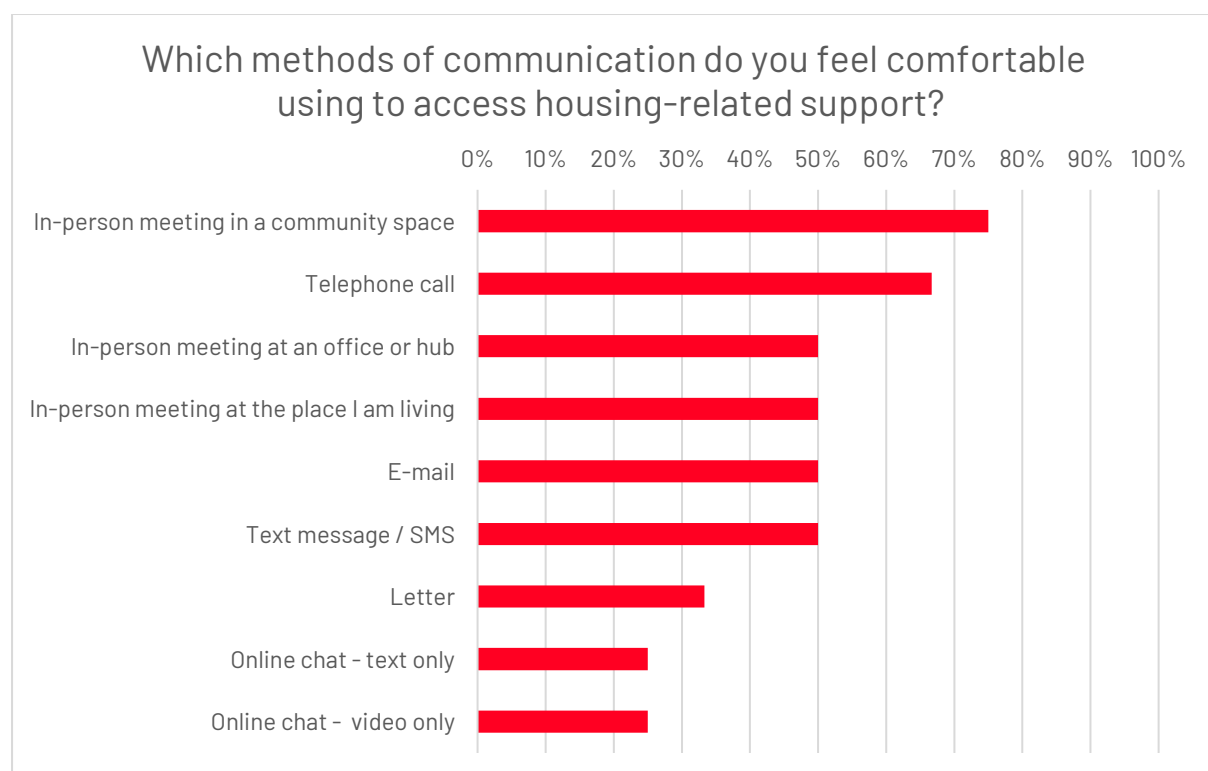


■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree

These survey results highlight that a majority of individuals were unsure where to reach out when they first needed to access housing support and advice. The data in Figure 1 was accompanied by anecdotal evidence of participants who spoke of reaching out to multiple agencies before being offered a homelessness assessment. Sometimes these were partner agencies who were unable to successfully signpost but in multiple instances participants reported that they had contacted the central TCBC phone line or a housing-specific service and had been incorrectly redirected.

Access to wider support was also highlighted as a challenge. While Figure 3 shows that two-thirds of respondents acknowledge that they were connected to other support options, this was primarily housing-specific support through either supported accommodation or an outreach worker. Three participants spoke of being signposted to mental health support but feeling unable to reach out without further support to do so. Two participants directly praised the input of the police in actively linking them with necessary wider support. Two young people credited the support of social services with linking them to both housing support and wider support. Overall, there was an inconsistent picture suggesting a lottery of access to broader support options that is impacted by which agencies and individuals become aware of someone's case.

Within this survey, respondents were also asked for their preferred communication styles when being contacted by housing support staff. Respondents were able to select as many options as they felt applied to them. 12 of 13 respondents answered this question (figure 5).

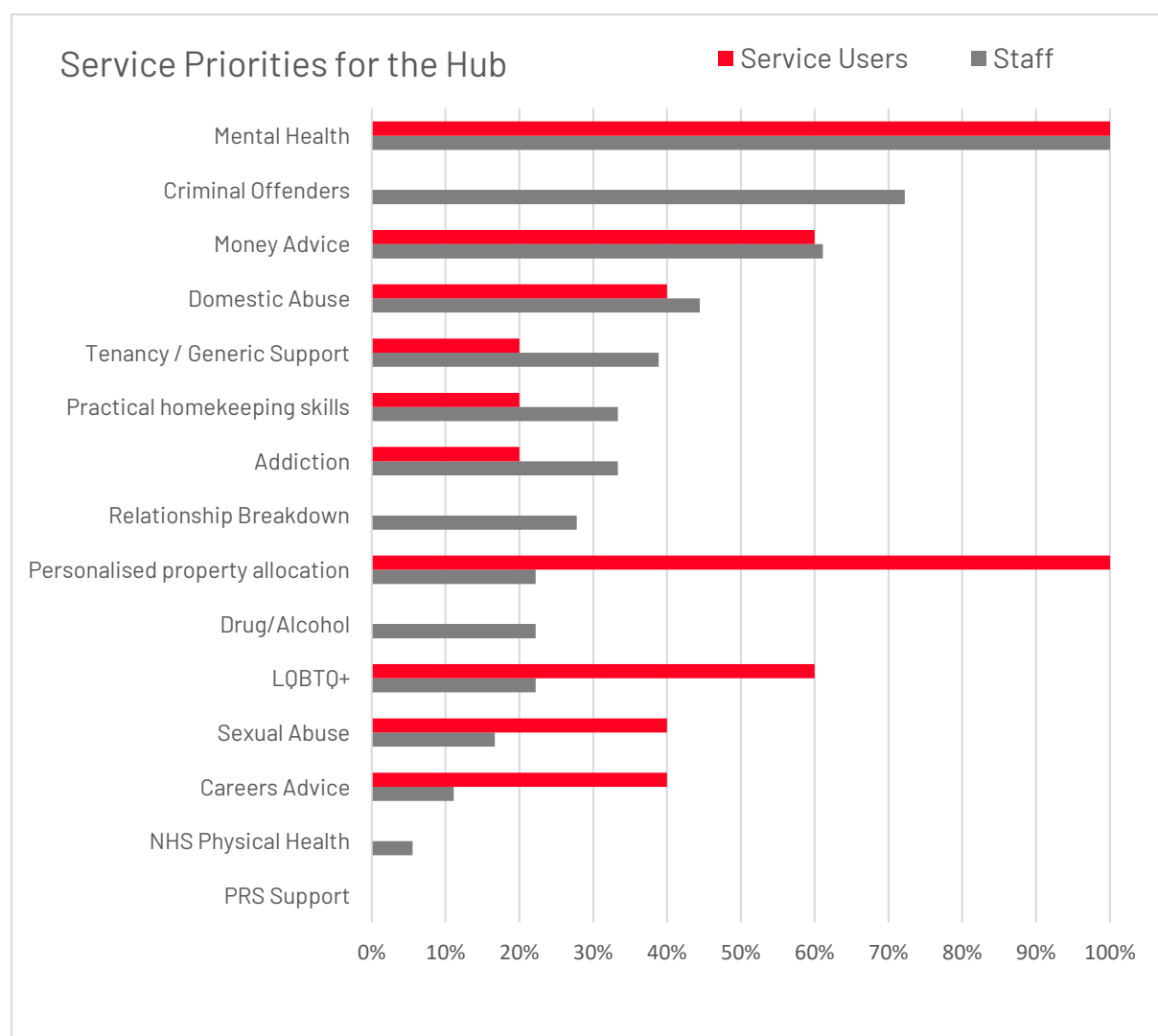


(Fig. 5)

4.2 Workshop event

The second phase of data collection was the workshop event. At this, participants circulated around a number of stations, each focusing on a different aspect of the Pearl House Hub plans. There were 37 attendees and each opted in or out of each activity. People who attended included those currently accessing housing support, third sector housing support staff, TCBC employees, and professionals from other third sector and grassroots organisations in Torfaen.

The first activity asked attendees to consider which types of service they felt should be present in or closely connected to the Hub at Pearl House. 23 individuals completed this activity, of which 18 were professionals and 5 were service users. This was a free-form activity where attendees could add new services or vote in support of services already listed by others. There was a notable distinction between the service types considered a priority by local professionals and those highlighted by service users (figure 6).



(Fig. 6)

The second activity gave attendees a summary version of the existing service specification for the Pearl House project which had been reviewed and approved by Torfaen Council (Appendix A). Attendees were then given the opportunity to review prompt questions to structure feedback on the proposals and what they would like to see from the Hub space at Pearl House. Responses

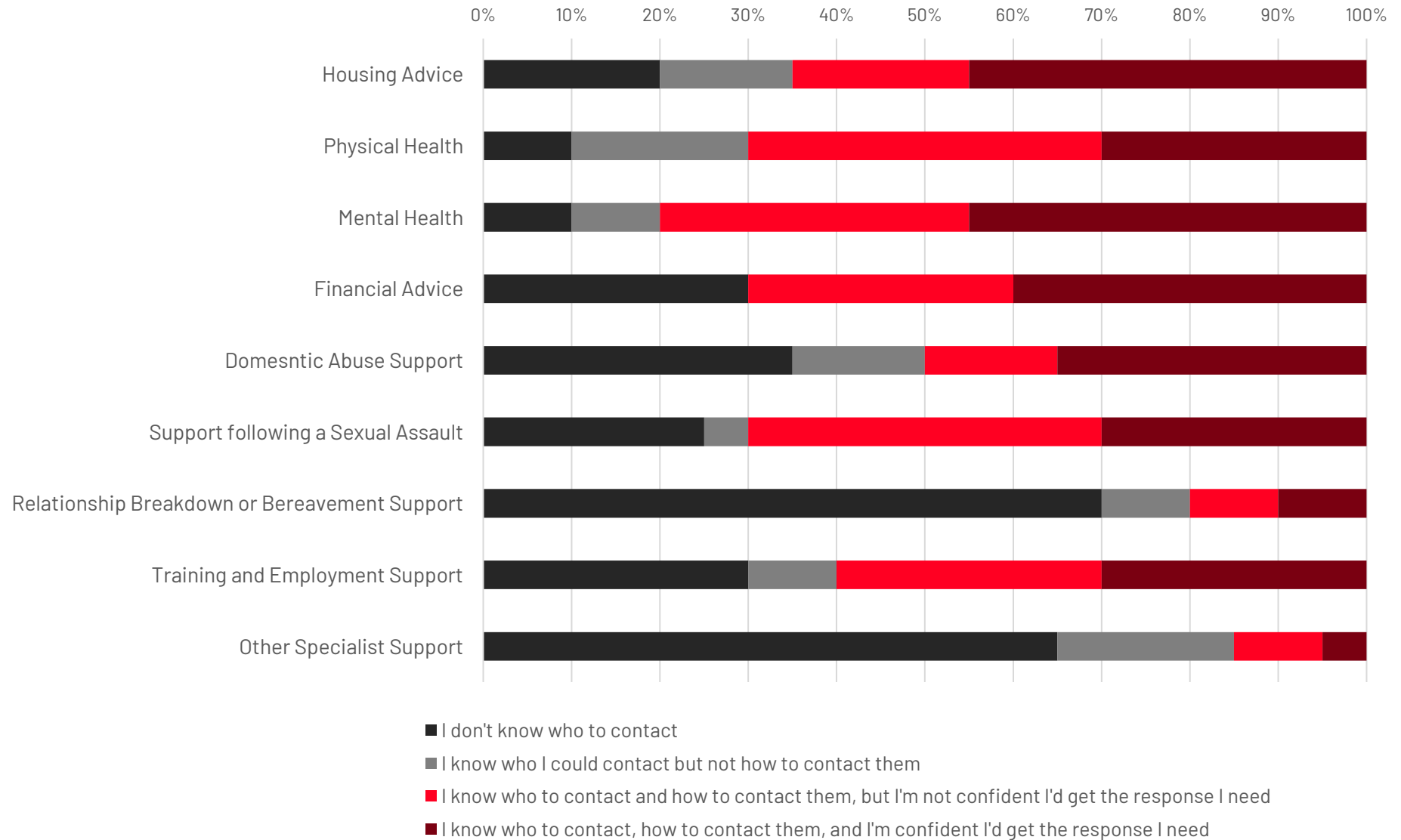
were broad-ranging and will be outlined further in the discussion section of this report but Figure 7 gives an overview of the feedback that professionals and service users highlighted.



(Fig. 7)

The third and final activity set out to understand people's confidence in their knowledge of the wider service and support map in Torfaen. 20 attendees took part in this activity, 14 professionals and 6 service users. Respondents were presented with 9 different areas of support that people might access and initially asked to rate their confidence in both their knowledge of existing services and in those services' ability to respond appropriately (Figure 8). They were then asked to list the organisations and services working in each area that they are aware of (Figures 9-17).

(Fig. 8) Confidence in knowledge of wider services and support



(Fig. 9-17) Who would you contact for support in each of these areas?

(Fig. 9)

Housing Advice	Responses	%
Council	7	37%
Wallich	6	32%
Citizens Advice	3	16%
Llamau	3	16%
Platfform	2	11%
Pobl	1	5%
Bron Afon	1	5%
Melin Homes	1	5%
Shelter Cymru	1	5%
I don't know	4	21%

(Fig. 10)

Financial Advice	Responses	%
Citizens Advice	12	63%
Council	2	11%
Bank	1	5%
StepChange	1	5%
Platfform	1	5%
Building Resilient Comms	1	5%
Food Banks	1	5%
Job Centre	1	5%
I don't know	5	26%

(Fig. 11)

Relationship Breakdown/ Bereavement		
	Responses	%
Cruise	2	11%
Council	2	11%
GP	1	5%
Friend/Relative	1	5%
Citizens Advice	1	5%
Mind	1	5%
Llamau	1	5%
I don't know	12	63%

(Fig. 12)

Mental Health	Responses	%
GP	6	32%
Mind	5	26%
111	4	21%
Platfform	4	21%
Crisis Team	3	16%
Friend/Relative	1	5%
Foodbank	1	5%
SHOUT textline	1	5%
Samaritans	1	5%
Police	1	5%
I don't know	3	16%

(Fig. 13)

Physical Health	Responses	%
GP	10	53%
111	2	11%
Occupational Therapy	2	11%
Friend/Relative	1	5%
Social Service	1	5%
I don't know	2	11%

(Fig. 14)

Training & Employment	Responses	%
Job Centre	11	58%
Careers Wales	3	16%
Communities Into Work	3	16%
Torfaen Works	2	11%
Employability Team	1	5%
Platfform	1	5%
Building Resilient Comms	1	5%
ACT	1	5%
People+	1	5%
I don't know	9	47%

(Fig. 15)

Sexual Assault	Responses	%
Police	14	74%
New Pathways	2	11%
Victim Support	1	5%
SARC Risca	1	5%
I don't know	4	21%

(Fig.16)

Specialist Support	Responses	%
Council	2	11%
Snap Cymru	1	5%
Gwent Carers Hub	1	5%
Age Concern	1	5%
Llamau	1	5%
TOGS	1	5%
Age Cymru	1	5%
Stonewall	1	5%
I don't know	14	74%

(Fig. 17)

Domestic Abuse	Responses	%
Women's Aid*	7	37%
Police	3	16%
Cyfannol	3	16%
Google	2	11%
Council	2	11%
Police	1	5%
Llamau / Pobl	1	5%
Citizens Advice	1	5%
I don't know	4	21%

* Note: Many of those who referenced "Women's Aid" explained that they were unsure which service provider offered this support locally. None of the attendees were able to state who offered support to people experiencing domestic abuse that did not identify as cis-women (such as men, non-binary or transgender people).

5. Discussion

The intention is for Pearl House to be a hub that the staff and residents of Torfaen identify as the first port of call for housing challenges and related issues. The research demonstrates an appetite and optimism for the Hub and willingness to engage in the partnership working needed for its success. The main focus of the research was on the Hub itself. However, there were some questions raised about the interface between the Hub and the accommodation that warrant inclusion:

- How will the 24/7 support be managed? Will the same staff cover the Hub and the accommodation? Will there always be at least two staff available for the Hub so that one can provide accommodation support if needed without leaving the desk unstaffed?
- Who will be eligible for the housing? If it is general housing, how will risks be managed? The specification identifies the existing and ongoing need for support for individuals dealing with domestic abuse, mental health challenges, learning disabilities, people who are over the age of 50 and younger people including those who have been in care. The research also highlighted the challenge of finding suitable placements for registered sex offenders and prison leavers in the area. The challenge of mixing these cohorts cannot be underestimated.

- Will the Hub be an extension of the supported accommodation which people in the accommodation feel more confident to access than non-residents? Could this work to the detriment of those seeking initial support or who are less familiar with the environment or staff?

Whilst there is significant value in the dual-purpose development, there are practical concerns about how to manage both aspects effectively. The service specification is a comprehensive and considered document that details an ambitious project. With the service provider and a timeframe now in place, there is an opportunity for TCBC and the commissioned service provider to clarify and refine the project. This will allow for high-level strategic discussions as well as day-to-day practical decisions to be made.

Although outside of the scope of this research, it would be remiss to not highlight the fact that no amount of intervention or prevention work will remove the need for more affordable and social housing. The addition of 15 units of accommodation in the area was welcomed by all who engaged with the research.

5.1 The Space

Maintaining a Flexible, Person-centred Approach

Since the pandemic, staff from various organisations have developed flexible ways of working that do not always require a static office space. This flexible approach has become more person-centred than pre-pandemic provision and should be protected. Service user feedback (Fig 5) also highlighted the range of preferences that exist, showing that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate.

The following recommendations aim to maximise the ability of the Hub space to contribute to this flexible, person-centred approach.

"We offer support tailored to our service users, we will offer face-to-face, we will offer home visits, telephone support or video. Engagement has gone up because we're able to cater to the way people like support. It works well and it shows in our numbers and in our cases."

TCBC Staff Member

Meeting the needs of the community

The specification states that "the Hub will be open to the public Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5pm" and that "the facility may be used to accommodate support drop-in provisions over the weekend and out of hours". Over the course of the research, concerns were raised about the capacity of a relatively small hub in Pontypool to provide an adequate service for the whole of Torfaen. It is also apparent that a significant amount of support already exists within this small area of the county and care should be taken to prevent all support gravitating towards Pontypool. Strong links and open channels of communication with established centres and organisations located in other areas of the county, particularly in Cwmbran and Blaenavon, will have two main benefits:

1. Service users can be supported to access other facilities to meet their needs e.g. well-being spaces, support groups, targeted projects

2. People in more distant parts of the county will be able to benefit from the new Hub remotely e.g. accessing the Hub by phone with the support of familiar staff, thereby widening its reach and impact.

Recommendation 1: Ensure that Hub staff have a robust and up to date understanding of other facilities that are available in Torfaen, e.g. wellbeing spaces, support groups, targeted projects.

Recommendation 2: Build strong links with established centres in other parts of the county and encourage partner centres to facilitate Hub support e.g. via phone or video link.

There was a recurring theme of the need for flexibility, and while a drop-in model allows for informality and spontaneity, there is potential risk for disappointment if someone travels to the Hub and is unable to see the organisation best placed to provide relevant support. If people are travelling, incurring costs, potentially taking time off work or organising childcare, it is imperative that they receive the support they need. Pontypool has generally good public transport links, although the train station is located out of town, and there is sufficient parking available, although at cost. These transport costs are significant and there should be careful consideration about how to make the support genuinely accessible and inclusive, e.g. financial support, online/phone contact options, satellite support. The option to pre-arrange appointments could be beneficial for some service users and possibly for staff. Although intended as a physical drop in, people often prefer to make contact via email, phone or text message. Facilitating, promoting and tracking multi-modal communication offers significant value and impact in a more flexible and inclusive offer.

Recommendation 3: Ensure avenues to access support are person centred by offering a range of ways to engage, i.e. drop-in, by appointment, by phone, etc.

An 8.30am start is not early enough for people working office hours, consequently working people could be at a disadvantage. Suggestions were made for a late-night opening and possible weekend sessions; these would need to be effectively promoted to be worthwhile.

Support while awaiting permanent accommodation

A further concern identified in the research is the perceived lack of support once duties are accepted and service users are on the accommodation pathway. At this stage, people can be placed in temporary accommodation until more permanent accommodation is provided or there is a vacancy in supported accommodation. An individual/family's support needs can still be significant at this time. Ongoing, often multi-agency, support is needed to create sustainable futures.

Examples from the research:

- Access to mental health services to minimise the trauma of temporary or unsuitable accommodation is limited.
- Neighbour and/or Landlord mediation which might help improve relationships and communication, ultimately preventing homelessness, is rarely available.

- Support with processes such as bidding on properties, job-seeking and benefits claims is limited.

"Sometimes it would be good to have someone help me to do these things. Not to say "there's the form, fill it out" but instead "here we'll do it together".

Service User

In addition, participants in the research highlighted support needs while in more permanent or supported accommodation:

- Young people in supported accommodation suggested they would value greater opportunity to develop their budgeting skills, employment opportunities and training, to improve their ability to sustain a tenancy in the future.
- The challenges of navigating and coping with the HomeSwapper system in an incredibly competitive environment were highlighted.

The need to provide holistic support for individuals and families until sustainable accommodation needs are met aligns with national policy objectives and is identified in the specification. This research corroborates the value of this support with both professionals and service users voicing concerns about its availability. The ability to access the Hub to gain advice about the additional support that might be available, get direct support from the Hub staff or be provided with relevant information would be valuable and impactful. As all who work in the sector are aware, housing need and personal circumstances change, often significantly; the journey from housing crisis to sustainable housing is rarely linear. The Hub is likely to support individuals and families on multiple occasions for multiple reasons; the real impact comes from meeting them at their point of need and building the right support at the right time.

Making the most of the space

As the building work nears completion and key staff are appointed, it will be necessary to carefully consider the physicality and functionality of the environment. The service specification identifies the importance of a psychologically informed environment and there are obvious accessibility obligations. Research participants were keen to know how accessible the building will be e.g. wheelchair turning space, the option for wheelchair users to wait in their chairs without blocking walkways. Experience of other open access buildings across Wales demonstrates how vital layout, lighting and noise levels are, especially for those who are neurodiverse. Service users and partners would provide valuable insight to get the design right first time.

Recommendation 4: Utilise the Trauma-Informed Practice Framework to create a physical environment that promotes a sense of safety and welcome.

Recommendation 5: Embed access and inclusion in the design of the physical space, drawing on insights from service users and staff.

Due to the limited space and intended hot-desking, careful timetabling of staff will be key to giving service users the best chance of getting the advice and guidance they need. This will need

to be accurate and clearly advertised (online and at the Hub). This is also true of access to phone or video calls to staff not located at the hub. Not all organisations will have the capacity to be available to the Hub at all times and clarity on this will help manage expectations. Also required is robust promotion of the Council's out-of-hours service and any other emergency provision; the research demonstrated a lack of awareness of the out-of-hours provision and clarity as to its function. It is imperative to demonstrate to people that advice and support is available and explain how the Hub fits within the existing landscape.

The need to provide service users with free internet access, charging points, internet / IT support, printing facilities and telephone access was mentioned by several research participants; the recommendation is not that the Hub must do this, but that clarity is provided about if the Hub will offer these facilities and, if not, where this need is met e.g. local libraries etc.

Recommendation 6: Provide clarity about the facilities and services on offer at or via the Hub, including promotion of an agreed timetable of presence or direct access with all partners. Ensure changes are communicated effectively, e.g. information online, mailing lists for partners. Ensure out-of-hours services are regularly and clearly promoted.

The use of the space as an additional venue to meet clients was of interest to staff; it would have less formality than the Civic Centre but more purpose than a coffee shop or the library. This idea has capacity and safeguarding considerations but would diversify usage and promote familiarity.

Safeguarding staff and service users

Staff from several agencies raised concerns around managing risk and behaviour, specifically:

- The lack of private spaces to allow confidential conversations to take place
- Providing sufficient privacy for confidential work to take place at the computer, e.g. completing UC updates, making GP requests
- The variety of lived experiences that could lead to difficult / potentially triggering situations
- The challenge of ensuring "keep apart" individuals who pose a risk to each other or victims and perpetrators are equally supported.
- The ability to safeguard staff from unacceptable / challenging behaviour from service users
- Limiting the time people will be expected / are permitted to wait.

Stakeholders, led by the service provider, should formulate a consistent approach to behaviour management, to be implemented by all professionals using the space. The expectations and any potential implications for non-compliance need to be effectively communicated to service users.

Our ongoing work with local authorities has highlighted the challenge of creating a welcoming environment while safeguarding everyone in a shared space. Expecting people to be calm, patient and respectful when they are anxious or overwhelmed is not always realistic. Ensuring that staff feel safe and that service users feel supported requires establishing a mutually

respectful environment from the offset. Posters such as Take Notice's 'How I am Feeling' can help in this endeavour.

Recommendation 7: Formulate a consistent approach to behaviour management, understood and implemented by all professionals using the space

Recommendation 8: Embed physical safeguarding measures in the Hub space, including to enable "keep apart", confidential conversations, etc.

Access to information

It is neither feasible nor appropriate to expect the Hub staff to meet every support need. Engagement with specialist support seems to be working effectively in Torfaen using a caseload model and the existence of the Hub should complement, not alter this.

Empowering people to explore their options, understand their rights and seek support should be at the heart of the provision. The waiting area provides an excellent opportunity to offer a range of printed information about available services. These should be provided by partner agencies whenever possible, but oversight will need to sit with the commissioned service provider and the goal should be the development of a 'library' of user-friendly information.

QR codes to various websites or online resources providing information could be an easy way to encourage people to conduct their own research. This would be even more beneficial if free Wi-Fi was provided.

The Hub could be an environment where people can make choices about how they access information, develop their own life skills, are encouraged to ask questions and are also able to access face to face support.

Recommendation 9: Collate a range of accessible printed information to ensure service users and professionals are aware of the services available to them, and empower service users to make choices about how they access support.

5.2 The Staff

Skills

The new Hub staff will have a vital role to play in coordinating partnership working in which everyone strives to prevent homelessness and, when it can't be prevented, ensures it is rare, brief and unrepeatable. The level of skill and knowledge required to do this effectively should not be underestimated. The Hub Manager's direct support duties should be as limited as possible to provide the time needed for them to establish and maintain the network, develop best practice, monitor the provision and promote the service.

We would encourage TCBC and the commissioned provider to consider early recruitment of key staff members connected to the Hub element of the project. Many of the recommendations arising from this research will take considerable time to implement in terms of mapping opportunities, building relationships and then negotiating the details of the partnership. The

project will be better equipped to serve residents from its opening if these processes are completed prior to service delivery with opportunities to review as the project develops.

Recommendation 10: Recruit for key project roles ahead of the planned opening to begin work with commissioners and potential partners.

Knowledge

It would be reasonable for anyone presenting at the Hub to expect staff to have a good general awareness of people's needs and the support available. Part 2, section 14 of the specification provides a detailed list of the working knowledge deemed necessary for project staff - although it is not clear if this is specifically aimed at Hub staff. Up-skilling staff to ensure service users receive the most up to date information, advice and guidance is to be commended, but the complexity of the sector should be noted, as should the fact that highly specialised professionals are on hand. Therefore it should be made clear that Hub staff should primarily have a generalist level of knowledge but be expert in knowing how to signpost and seek further information where needed.

Across Torfaen, there seems to be an emphasis on specialist support with defined eligibility criteria utilising a casework model of engagement. The Gateway system is used effectively, and a significant number of support services are available, but the data demonstrates a current lack of awareness from the service users about what services exist, the eligibility criteria and how to access the most appropriate support (Figs. 9 to 17). There is more awareness from staff, but this confidence seems to have been developed over time and is largely dependent on individuals as opposed to purposeful networking and clear provision mapping. When asked to name services available in different support areas, respondents collectively produced a wide-ranging, in-depth list of opportunities but figures 10-17 show the small proportion of respondents who listed each of these opportunities. A significant number of support options were listed by only one respondent. This reflects the anecdotal evidence borne out of conversations with staff and semi-structured interviews which suggested that there are a few well-connected individuals as opposed to an embedded system-wide multi-agency approach. This poses a major risk when those knowledgeable individuals leave a team and is likely the underlying cause of the lottery of access to support that service users highlighted in this research. Providing all staff with the information they require to maximise partnership working would be beneficial for all.

"You need those relationships with other people because you are the specialist in your area. And that's good, that's how it should be because people deserve specialist support but silo-d working doesn't work"

Third Sector Manager

We are aware of existing work by Torfaen Council to map local support opportunities. It is appropriate that this work is led by the local authority, as it is unrealistic to expect the service provider to independently build the provision map of the county. That information is a key resource for all stakeholders and would be most effectively compiled by senior Council staff. To ensure both accurate signposting and provide realistic expectations of partners, this mapping should detail the remits, responsibilities and referral processes of each organisation.

Recommendation 11: TCBC to map local support options, including remits and referral processes for each organisation, and keep this information up to date.

Training

To complement these efforts to raise awareness of services available, a collective approach to training would provide a level of competence and confidence across different agencies to provide general information about services alongside specialist support according to their roles. The research highlighted the importance of the Hub in developing professional awareness and relationships between staff which, in turn, promotes holistic support.

There was an enthusiasm for peer-to-peer professional learning as a way to develop professional skills and expertise and subsequent support for service users. This could even be extended to include some training for service users to increase their understanding of and engagement with providers in the area, creating the potential for peer support. Workshops or seminars could help share best practice, identify areas of duplication, improve referrals and promote effective partnership working.

As the Hub will be staffed by a range of services and likely a rotating team, some standardisation of training would be beneficial in order to develop a shared ethos of person-centred, trauma-informed provision. It would be worth considering the joint commissioning of training and utilise the potential training offers of partner organisations, such as support from Cyfannol to increase local understanding of “Ask and Act” principles.

Recommendation 12: Consider shared commissioning of training among partners and utilise opportunities to access training offered by partners.

As the primary aim of the Hub is to support people in housing need, this training programme should include appropriate levels of training in Welsh housing law and homelessness rights. As outlined already, this housing need may be triggered by a broad range of factors, however, every service user will need to be supported to understand their housing and homelessness rights and the statutory processes they must go through. This responsibility sits in law with the local authority. It is therefore important that TCBC either provide or commission appropriate training for all partners contributing to the Hub so that service users are supported at every stage to access their housing rights.

Recommendation 13: TCBC to proactively support service providers to assist service users to access their housing and homelessness rights.

Information for Staff

As outlined above, a shared knowledge and skills base would help reduce the lottery of experience identified in the research. An informed and confident team will benefit service users.

A Welcome Pack for all visiting staff would facilitate this, this does not need to be extensive. Elements to consider could be:

- Overview of visiting providers and contact details
- Timetabling information – who is in when
- Key facility information – fire exits, emergency contacts, ICT information
- Expectations and vision statement

Recommendation 14: Develop an induction process for partner staff co-locating in the Hub to facilitate a warm welcome and help develop grassroots relationships.

Second Tier Support – professional to professional

One of the considerable advantages of a centralised multi-agency hub is the potential for more effective sharing of specialist knowledge between professionals and increased awareness and understanding of different services across the sector. We cannot expect, nor do we want, people to know everything about everything. There will always be a need to maintain professional boundaries, and fulfil specific roles and responsibilities, but a multi-agency space will allow for more sharing of skills and greater awareness of support provision.

The service specification does not outline the responsibilities the Hub will have towards local professionals. The primary function of the Hub will be to serve the residents of Torfaen but offering second-tier support, directly from professional to professional, would have significant benefit. The up to date knowledge and resources of the Hub could be accessed by partner professionals, with the Hub acting as a centralised information point for residents and professionals alike. If this responsibility were to be set out as an explicit function of the Hub it could:

- Ensure greater equity of access to appropriate support for residents
- Enhance the knowledge of frontline staff
- Strengthen partnership working within the Hub and across Torfaen
- Reduce instances of incorrect signposting and referrals

This second-tier support would reduce the current risks when individual, well-connected staff leave a team and would help to embed partnership working across sectors as a practice norm in Torfaen. As outlined below, we would encourage the Pearl House project service provider and TCBC to consider adopting a “No Wrong Door” approach through the Hub. Traditional “No Wrong Door” approaches require a high level of cross-sector understanding from all frontline professionals. They are then able to refer or accurately signpost to other avenues of support when their service is not the right fit for someone’s current needs. This research suggests that this level of cross-sector understanding has not yet been achieved in Torfaen. If the Hub held a responsibility for supporting other professionals locally then the project would be well placed to act as a central node to facilitate a “No Wrong Door” approach.

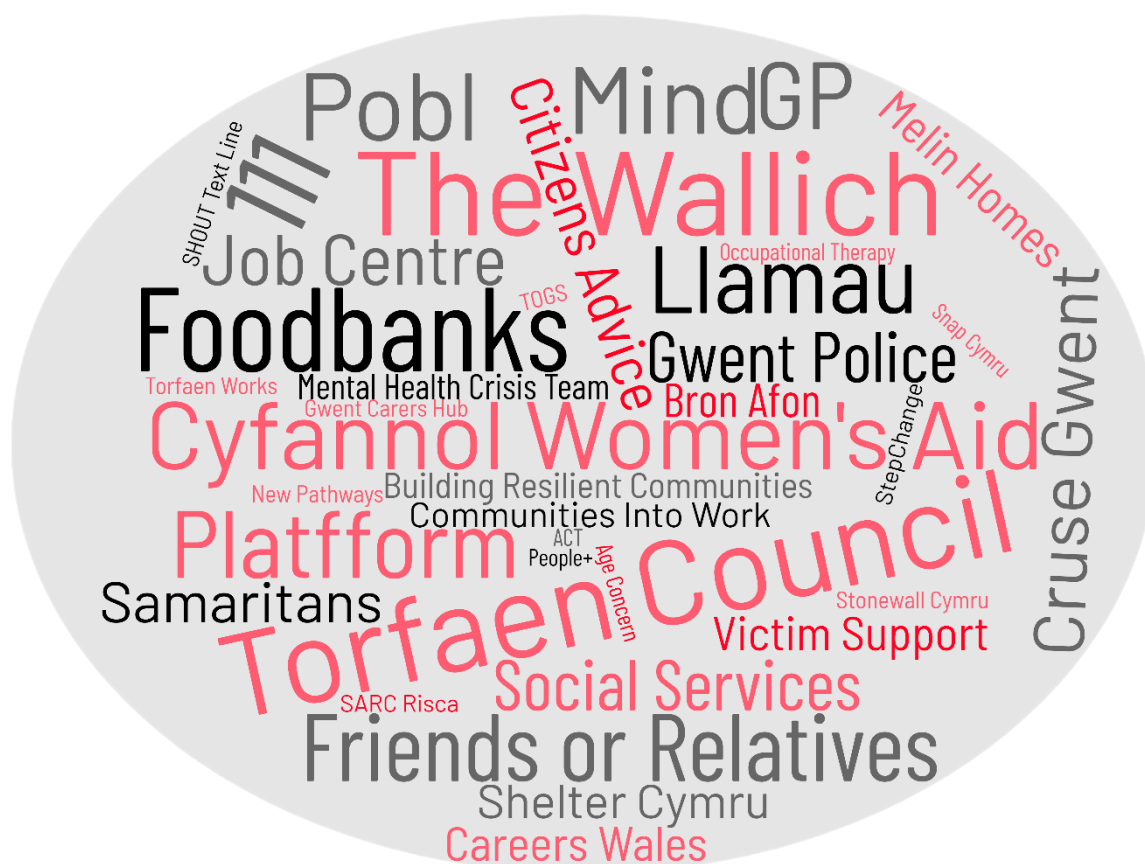
Recommendation 15: Consider the Hub’s role in enabling partnership working and a ‘No Wrong Door’ approach across Torfaen, by developing it as a valuable information resource for professionals as well as service users – “second tier” support.

5.3 The System

Ending the Lottery of Experience

A multi-agency approach is at the core of the Hub element of the Pearl House project and is essential to its role as “a vital component of the preventative and responsive agenda to tackling and alleviating homelessness in Torfaen” (Torfaen Council, 2023). The service specification sets out that the support offered by the Hub will be based in a multi-agency approach and lists some potential key partners. The local authority would like to see involvement from services within social care, primary care, mental health services, probation, youth offender support, and substance misuse support, among others.

Torfaen benefits from a broad range of existing support services covering an array of potential support needs; see figure 18 below for some examples raised by participants of this research.



(Fig. 18)

While this is to be celebrated, it does also come with several challenges as noted by research participants. Almost 65% of service users surveyed for this research felt that they were connected with wider support that was appropriate to their needs (figure 3). Although this is a majority, it suggests that a significant number of people with co-occurring support needs in Torfaen are not yet being suitably connected to other organisations.

Our data gathering highlights that there are knowledge gaps in a number of support areas for staff and service users in Torfaen. A small but notable number of participants (20%) did not know who they could contact when looking to access housing advice. There were more significant gaps in knowledge of support options for support following a bereavement or relationship breakdown

(70% responded “I don’t know who to contact”) or types of specialist support for people, such as advocacy for people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community or tailored support for neurodivergent people (64% responded “I don’t know who to contact”).

In the areas where people felt the most appropriate supporting organisation would be a statutory service (e.g. the GP for physical or mental health concerns or the police following a sexual assault) there was confidence about how to contact those teams but concern that the response may not be appropriate to the individual’s need at that time. In both examples 40% of respondents answered with “I know who to contact and how to contact them but I’m not confident I’d get the response I need”.

The experiences of partnership work for service users who engaged with this research varied hugely. Some, particularly those in supported accommodation, spoke of being referred to other areas of support that they feel are beneficial. Others told of being sent a list of potential support options with phone numbers with the expectation on them to reach out to these organisations. On the furthest end of the spectrum were stories of being “passed from pillar to post” with organisations mis-signposting or not recognising someone’s support needs at that time.

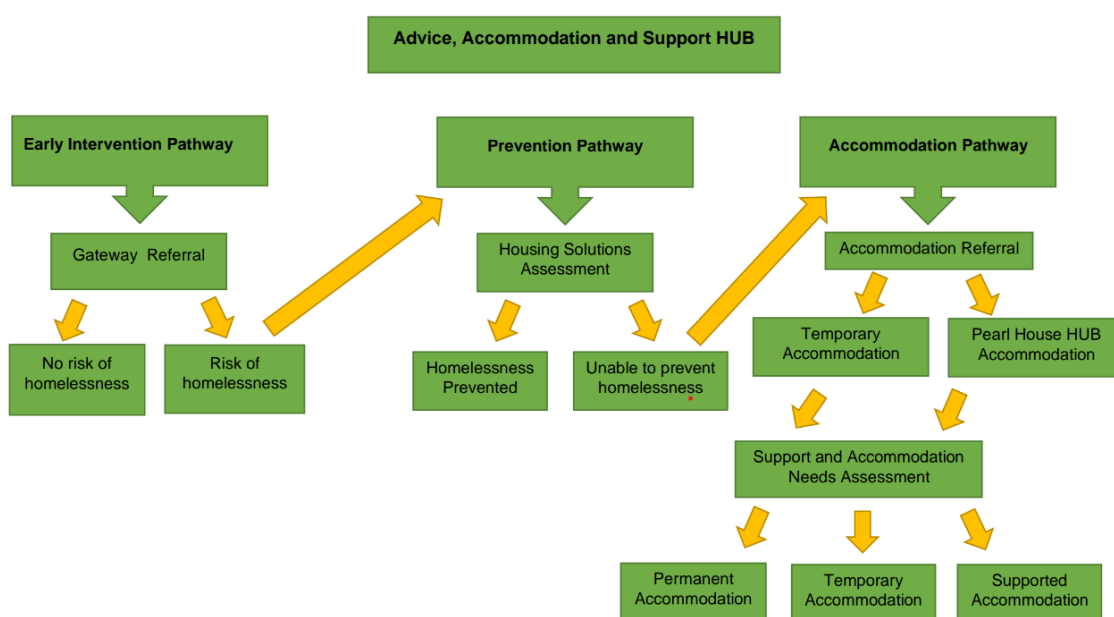
“It would have been helpful if they'd explained who the people on the list were or helped me to call or even given them my number so they call me.”

Service User

Early Intervention

The Housing Support Grant (HSG) programme encourages a blend of services from early intervention and prevention as well as assistance in crisis situations. When considering the well-documented overlap between housing difficulties and many other types of adversity, it becomes clear that the Hub will add most value if it acts as an access point to a broad range of support options.

The Hub offers an opportunity to build up the level of early intervention work with residents in Torfaen through its multi-agency approach.



Accommodation and Support Intervention Pathway Model – Provided by TCBC

As seen from the above diagram, when a risk of homelessness is identified, there is a clear pathway to relevant support in this model.

In the operational concept document (Appendix C), it states that:

“Individuals may present with accommodation related issues that are not necessarily placing them at risk of being made homeless. In these instances, individuals may require support to address their issues [...] at the earliest opportunity. This may involve diverting an individual to other services to provide support and interventions to assist them.”

Defining an ‘accommodation related issue that is not necessarily placing [an individual] at risk of being made homeless’ posed a significant challenge to researchers. There are multiple complex paths to homelessness and identifying someone’s level of risk is equally complex. Part 2, Section 3 of the specification (Housing Related Support), details a comprehensive list of potential support needs that fall into the scope of Early Intervention. This demonstrates TCBC’s awareness of the intersectionality of issues and the need for the Hub to appropriately assess, advise and signpost people to prevent homelessness significantly upstream of current practices.

However, in the proposed pathway model where there is no *perceived risk of homelessness*, there is no identified pathway. This potentially creates a risk of service users being turned away from support without adequate onward signposting.

We welcome the early intervention pathway and want to see this enacted via the Hub in a way that minimises gatekeeping and uses effective signposting to utilise all the expertise in Torfaen. There is work to do to clarify the scope of early intervention within the parameters of this project in a way that manages expectations and retains a focus on the core housing need, but promoting the Hub in terms that clearly put an emphasis on the broader aim of ‘holding back homelessness’.

The drop-in nature of the Hub lends itself better to people at the beginning of their support journey. Those already receiving specialist support are likely to contact their case workers to arrange an appointment. Pearl House should facilitate a broad range of support and will be well-placed to offer generalist information, advice and guidance.

Recommendation 16: TCBC to consider the feasibility of implementing a ‘no wrong door’ approach through the Hub model through a low threshold for Gateway referral under the Early Intervention pathway, and particularly by defining what signposting to appropriate support should be available from Hub staff in the event of a Gateway referral indicating no risk of homelessness.

It is important to distinguish between *providing* support and *enabling* support, i.e. through signposting and onward referrals. The service provider needs to be clear about the direct support they can and will provide and their wider signposting function. Consistent use of language can help create this clarity:

Signposting	The provision of contact details with the assumption that the service user will make contact independently.
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Warm introduction	The active linking up of the service user with an appropriate contact e.g. via email, phone or in person.
Referral	The checking of eligibility of the service user and the provision of appropriate information to the new service provider with the understanding that support will be offered as soon as possible.
Scaffolded support	Ongoing support by an existing service provider to encourage engagement with a new provider and offer more holistic support.
Peer support	As scaffolded support, but offered by a peer support worker or peer support volunteer.

Information sharing

The concerns raised by staff around partnership working, particularly with regard to information sharing, paint a picture of some of the potential causes of the inconsistencies in service user experiences. Professionals highlighted concerns around:

- Being unable to access information that would enable them to better support service users
- Service users being asked to repeat sensitive and distressing information in order to access different services
- A potential for duplication of work when different services are involved due to a lack of information sharing
- A lack of clarity around their own requirements under the GDPR and their organisations own policy causing them to err on the side of caution
- A lack of consistency regarding information sharing, i.e. when agreements are in place but then are not followed through by all staff involved so information is lost or only raised at crisis point.

The Hub project can learn from these experiences and ensure they are not repeated in their own partnership work. One consideration would be to explore the Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information ([WASPI](#)), referenced in our literature review, and their guidance on producing robust Information Sharing Protocols across sectors. The WASPI framework has been found to break down the barriers to successful information sharing across organisations and sectors by helping partnerships to navigate legal complexities and reducing uncertainty for staff about what information can be shared appropriately within the scope of data protection regulations ([WASPI](#)). Information sharing can also be central to adequate risk assessment and management that are part of safeguarding measures. Information sharing agreements are already in place in Torfaen in a number of settings, such as MARAC and MAPPA meetings, where multi-agency collaboration is essential.

“People will stop engaging because they feel like they’ve told their story five times and not gotten any help”
Statutory Service Team Member

Recommendation 17: Embed robust information sharing mechanisms, built on identified good practice and consider using WASPI framework to ensure clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders in data management and information sharing.

Frontline housing staff involved in this research also raised that they would like to see dedicated partnership meetings that are case-focused and looking at options to support individuals from a multi-agency perspective. The nature of the Hub model as a drop-in, light-touch approach with a multi-agency grounding could create a space for them to lead on a regular meeting to discuss approaches for individuals who appear to be “falling through the net” of existing service provision. If such spaces already exist and are led by local authority housing staff then there is an opportunity for their existence and function to be communicated to housing sector and partner staff. This style of meeting would need to be underpinned by robust information sharing protocols to allow attendees to bring the information from their services to build a fuller picture of someone’s current support needs.

Recommendation 18: Reform regular multi-agency meetings to plan joint approach to engage “hard to reach” service users.

Some of the concerns around duplication of work and a lack of understanding of who is currently involved in an individual’s support plan would not be for the Hub to address. In the interest of furthering effective partnership work locally, Torfaen Council might wish to consider what changes could be made to their existing IT systems to increase appropriate access for partner providers. Staff from commissioned services gave anecdotal evidence of duplication of work and missed opportunities for re-engagement with support due to a lack of access to information.

Recommendation 19: Consider what changes can be made to current IT systems (e.g. Gateway) to increase access to relevant information for partner providers and avoid repetition for service users.

Incentivising partnership working

Building a multi-agency approach on existing good practice is essential for the success of the Hub. Examples locally include the working arrangements between probation and various housing services. As a non-statutory service, the Hub potentially holds less sway in negotiating agreements and protocols than their colleagues in probation and health services may have. The Hub project does not bring with it any additional funding for potential partners to increase their resources in order to embed involvement in the project. While the research demonstrates grass roots enthusiasm for the project, we have no real knowledge of the level of commitment from senior/ strategic levels. Potential changes to Welsh legislation around homelessness would see an increased duty on associated sectors in time if the proposals are carried forward. Nonetheless, at its inception the project will be reliant on the good will of potential partners and

their understanding of the benefits of a whole system approach. It is therefore important that TCBC provide support to foster workable partnerships – especially with statutory services.

The potential partners who engaged with this research raised a number of different ways in which their team could work with the Pearl House Hub:

- Some have capacity to base a team member at the Hub on an agreed rotation to offer a drop-in triage provision.
- Others would be unable to have a staff member located in the Hub but have existing duty lines open during service working hours and are willing to agree a process for Hub staff to raise queries or referrals through this route.
- Several potential partners outside of the housing sector have offered training sessions for Hub staff and/or wider partners to give them the skills and confidence to identify when their service would be the most appropriate route and how to refer.
- Some of these services hope to arrange referral mechanisms that will prevent a service user from having to repeat potentially sensitive or distressing details and will reduce any wait time for the service user to be linked with the right support.
- One service raised the potential for Hub staff to shadow some of their frontline workers to understand how provision in that sector looks on the ground.

The conversations that took place during this research suggest that willingness to be involved exists among potential partners alongside some concerns around resources and practicalities. All partner agencies will have their own targets, ambitions and reporting obligations. With this in mind, we would encourage the Pearl House service provider to negotiate individual, tailored service level agreements with each partner. Having a broad range of partners involved according to their capacity will serve residents better than expecting uniformity of commitment from partner agencies; offering flexibility, with opportunities to deepen working arrangements over time, will best achieve this.

Recommendation 20: Nurture strategic and mutually beneficial partnerships by creating individually tailored service level agreements with each potential partner organisation.

'We all do the same thing. We're all here for the same reason, to help people.'

Housing Support Worker

5.4 Service User Involvement

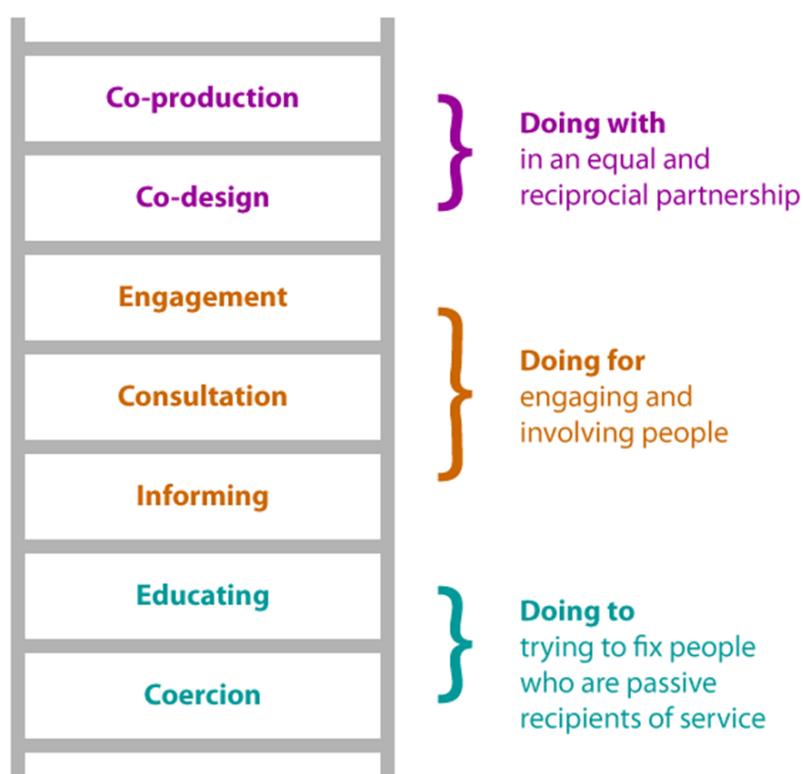
This research found evidence of local commitment to including the voices of service users in the evaluation of service delivery and design in Torfaen. For instance:

- The regular engagement opportunities outlined in TCBC's Housing Support Programme Delivery Plan, both in partnership with other Gwent authorities and solely within Torfaen ([TCBC 2021](#))
- The service specification for the Pearl House project sets a clear requirement for the service provider to engage with people with lived experience of housing insecurity to inform the development of the project. This includes involving service users in "staff

recruitment, induction and appraisal processes wherever practicable” alongside forming a Service User Forum and incorporating service user satisfaction surveys into their evaluation process.

- Torfaen Council sought to commission this piece of research to gather feedback from local service users to inform the plans for the Pearl House Project.

Think Local, Act Personal’s “Ladder of Co-Production” (figure 19) sets out 7 levels of service user involvement ranging from “coercion” to “co-production” ([TLAP 2021](#)). While produced by and for the health and social care sector, it provides a useful framework for all of us to self-assess the depth of our service user involvement. The existing work in Torfaen largely sits between “consultation” and “engagement” for a number of reasons. There are clear routes for service users to give feedback to those in power but there are limitations to this. This is an excellent point from which to build.



(Fig. 19: “Ladder of Co-Production”, *Think Local Act Personal*, 2021)

The involvement of service users in the Pearl House project should be based on an equal reciprocal relationship wherever possible. We would encourage the service provider to develop a service user forum which convenes regularly and welcomes open discussion, rather than operating on a pattern following the project’s reporting requirements. The forum would benefit from adopting co-production principles wherever possible, and aspire to local decision making being a more collaborative process. We are realistic that achieving a fully co-produced service is the end result of a long process so would encourage the service provider to make use of the Ladder of Co-Production, or Arnstein’s earlier Ladder of Participation ([Arnstein 1969](#)), to regularly self-assess and ensure their inclusion remains both appropriate and ambitious.

Recommendation 21: Adopt co-production principles where possible and use the Ladder of Co-Production to make sure involvement is appropriate while also being ambitious.

Outside of this project context, it was noted that the current HSG engagement process struggles to involve service users who have engaged with the drop-in style services locally. The professionals involved in this research were unsure if other approaches to engagement had been attempted or service users had been consulted for their views on how involvement could be made more accessible. This research shows the desire of the local authority to work with service users but the timing of the research highlights existing limitations. The service specification for the Pearl House project was written before the research began and the tender process was completed in full before this report had been finalised. This restricts the immediate influence that service user feedback can have on the Pearl House project.

Moving forward, we would welcome the formation of a sector-wide service user and partner forum enabled by the local authority or, potentially, an independent body such as Shelter Cymru's Take Notice project. As with the Pearl House project-specific forum we would encourage use of participatory practices and mechanisms that enable power sharing where possible. Such a forum would be well placed to feed into future service design and development, ensuring that the perspective of experts by experience is incorporated at an earlier stage than this research has allowed.

"People need better training to understand people's situations. There should be more recruitment of people who've experienced homelessness."

Service User

A forum that combines the expertise of both service users and professionals is a crucial step towards redressing power imbalances but also creates space for local professionals who have lived experience to draw on their full range of experiences. People with lived experience of a variety of social issues have highlighted a common concern around being "pigeon-holed" by their experiences and this restricting their potential career development ([Sandhu 2017](#)). Within this research, a small number of service users involved said that all services locally would benefit from active recruitment of people with lived experience of homelessness or housing insecurity. Taking steps to celebrate and centre the voices of those with lived expertise may give space for existing professionals to share their experiences while also upskilling service users to potentially move into professional roles in the sector.

Recommendation 22: TCBC to consider commissioning a broader, ongoing service user and partner forum, with the aim of facilitating involvement of service users in future service planning and design at the earliest stages.

Monitoring and Evaluation

With the significant capital, time and expertise invested in the Pearl House Hub, there is a need to embed a carefully considered monitoring and evaluation approach in the provision from the offset. It is likely that every organisation involved will have existing targets, performance indicators and reporting mechanisms; it would be easy to risk duplication of work or double counting, and this should be taken into account when deciding reporting requirements.

Documenting the advice given can take time away from giving the advice, but this can be largely mitigated by establishing the evaluation process during the development phase. The value of monitoring is identified in the specification and, if embraced as a core function of the service provider, it serves to support all stakeholders. Accurately monitoring the provision provides opportunities to celebrate good practice and positive outcomes as well as identifying areas for improvement. Every opportunity to celebrate success should be taken.

As previously discussed, there is likely to be a wide range of information, advice and guidance provided in a number of formats. In order to assess the impact of all interventions and the efficacy of the Hub itself, clear processes are needed to monitor, track and triage all contact points and types of enquiries. The service provider will need to know who is using the Hub, what support is required and what type of intervention took place e.g. one-off advice, signposting, warm introductions, direct support. Due to the drop-in and informal nature of the provision, service users might receive very light touch support in the form of signposting or a warm introduction. There is always a risk that this type of contact is not recorded, but its value is significant and it can mark the beginning of purposeful intervention. Service users who feel validated and supported from first contact are far more likely to engage.

Recommendation 23: Document all interventions and support offered by the Hub from brief signposting to longer support periods.

To effectively demonstrate the value of the Hub for the partner agencies as well as the added value of the whole project, mutually beneficial reporting mechanisms need to be carefully considered. These could draw on existing markers already tracked by partners, but a key indicator will be one of successful partnership working. The tracking and success of signposting and referrals from one organisation to another will help to ensure that referrals are suitable and help demonstrate the impact of the Hub.

The responsibility for reporting will rest with the service provider and due to the funding mechanism, HSG reporting will be a cornerstone of this work. It is vital that the service provider in conjunction with TCBC develop a reporting framework that satisfies but is not limited to HSG requirements. A more nuanced and reflective approach which celebrates success, combines qualitative with quantitative data and includes feedback from all stakeholders can and should be implemented. Pearl House Hub provides an incredible opportunity to track the client journey and address the housing needs in the area. The sharing of information and the focus on partnership working should facilitate the type of holistic support that has long been advocated and considered best practice.

Recommendation 24: TCBC and the Pearl House service provider to co-produce a reporting and monitoring process to demonstrate how the Hub adds value, in particular by conducting end-to-end monitoring to track success in joint working; consider this in service level agreements where possible.

To ensure that the service is accessible and inclusive to all, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) information needs to be tracked. There are likely to be a range of tools in place across the partner organisations and where possible these variations should be eliminated to make the data as robust as possible. Once this information is recorded, the service user does not want to repeat it for partner agencies, so this data should form part of information sharing considerations. Staff need to understand and acknowledge the value of tracking EDI data and communicate this appropriately to service users.

There is often a risk when under pressure to fulfill the requirements of a contract, that there is limited emphasis on fostering a learning environment where problems can be explored, barriers can be understood, and solutions are created. Through the Pearl House project there will be opportunity to identify any potential gaps in the support in Torfaen, any shifts caused by local or national decisions and get a real sense of grass roots experience of service users and staff. Recording situations where people's needs could not be met and where the support was not available or appropriate can be as valuable as monitoring positive outcomes as this insight can help inform TCBC's service development plans. Future-focused conversations should be welcomed and encouraged by TCBC especially when we acknowledge that the ultimate responsibility for homelessness prevention rests with the local authority.

Recommendation 25: TCBC to identify what is needed within the Hub and beyond by engaging in blame free conversations with commissioned services.

There is considerable scope for feedback from clients as identified in the service specification. From simple feedback forms to suggestion boxes, online surveys, call backs and focus groups, there are a range of tools that can be utilised to ensure the focus stays on the experience of those using the service. Case studies can powerfully capture these experiences and provide qualitative data that demonstrates the added value of the provision. Encouraging feedback from clients is not only integral to ensuring a client-focused approach and a responsive provision, it can also mark the beginning of a co-productive approach. By explicitly asking service users for their feedback, valuing their views without challenge, and making improvements whenever possible, the service provider can begin to shift the balance of power.

Mystery shopping is a useful way to understand the provision and identify improvements as well as highlight areas of good practice. It can and should be carried out by all stakeholders and undertaken in a constructive manner. Shelter Cymru's Take Notice project has significant experience of delivering this in other areas and is well placed to provide support, such as recruiting local mystery shoppers with lived experience.

It would always be beneficial to know how people learned about the Hub, how it is being promoted, and to gauge people's understanding of its remit and purpose. The waiting area provides an excellent place to encourage service user involvement by advertising focus groups, providing a suggestions box, facilitating online and paper-based surveys and, most importantly, conveying the importance of service user involvement to everyone who visits.

Recommendation 26: Utilise qualitative feedback to understand service user and partner perspectives and value added.

Recommendation 27: Encourage and value all methods of feedback and engagement from all stakeholders

"I really appreciate having the opportunity to voice our thoughts. More often than not we don't get that option. There's lots of people saying 'these things are being implemented' but they don't always ask the people doing the job. So for us to have that input means a lot."

Third Sector Staff Member

Reflection and partner feedback can be overlooked, especially when organisations of different sizes are involved and when there is a statutory / non-statutory split. Good partnership working requires honest reflection and power sharing. In order to work for the services users, the Hub will need to work for the organisations and staff involved.

TCBC have shared initial plans for the introduction of a Pearl House Management Board which will comprise key stakeholders and will meet regularly to provide oversight and reflection. The structure and purpose of this board will need to be clearly defined in order to ensure it becomes a valuable tool in the effective monitoring and development of the project. It should be led by TCBC with emphasis on support and collaboration in order to meet the statutory duties of the Local Authority.

Recommendation 28: Ensure the Pearl House Management Board is representative of the range of stakeholders for the project, including people with lived experience, in terms of both membership and equity of involvement.

6. Conclusion

Torfaen Council's plans for the new Advice, Accommodation and Support Hub showcase an ambitious project that has the potential to reduce barriers to accessing support for people across the county. Given the right conditions, service users will benefit from holistic support which is able to draw on the right agencies at the right time in a genuinely person-centred response. This will only be achieved through careful consideration of how best to use the resources available: space, staff, systems and stakeholders.

This research has drawn on a wealth of local voices to explore how this could be achieved in practice and has formulated a series of recommendations for the ongoing development of the Pearl House Project. These recommendations offer an opportunity to refine the plans for the project in light of the feedback of service users and frontline staff in Torfaen. They reflect the optimism for the project expressed by participants and highlight some areas for consideration that may not have been fully resolved in the service plans to date.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The Space

To maximise the ability of the Hub space to contribute to a trauma-informed, flexible, person-centred approach:

1. Ensure that Hub staff have a robust and up to date understanding of other facilities that are available in Torfaen, e.g. wellbeing spaces, support groups, targeted projects.
2. Build strong links with established centres in other parts of the county and encourage partner centres to enable Hub support e.g. via phone or video link.
3. Ensure avenues to access support are person centred by offering a range of ways to engage, i.e. drop-in, by appointment, by phone, etc.
4. Utilise the Trauma-Informed Practice Framework to create a physical environment that promotes a sense of safety and welcome.
5. Embed access and inclusion in the design of the physical space, drawing on insights from service users and staff.
6. Provide clarity about the facilities and services on offer at or via the Hub, including promotion of an agreed timetable of presence or direct access with all partners. Ensure changes are communicated effectively, e.g. information online, mailing lists for partners. Ensure out-of-hours services are regularly and clearly promoted.
7. Formulate a consistent approach to behaviour management, understood and implemented by all professionals using the space
8. Embed physical safeguarding measures in the Hub space, including to enable "keep apart", space for confidential conversations, etc.
9. Collate a range of accessible printed information to ensure service users and professionals are aware of the services available to them, and empower service users to make choices about how they access support.

7.2 The Staff

To foster a multi-agency workforce with a level of competence and confidence to provide general information about services available with a focus on 'holding back homelessness':

10. Recruit for key project roles ahead of the planned opening to begin work with commissioners and potential partners.
11. TCBC to map local support options, including remits and referral processes for each organisation, and keep this information up to date.
12. Consider shared commissioning of training among partners and utilise opportunities to access training offered by partners.
13. TCBC to proactively support service providers to assist service users to access their housing and homelessness rights.
14. Develop an induction process for partner staff co-locating in the Hub to facilitate a warm welcome and help develop grassroots relationships.
15. Consider the Hub's role in enabling partnership working and a 'No Wrong Door' approach across Torfaen, by developing it as a valuable information resource for professionals as well as service users – "second tier" support.

7.3 The System

To develop a truly multi-agency approach and maximise opportunities for early intervention and prevention:

- 16.** TCBC to consider the feasibility of implementing a 'no wrong door' approach through the Hub model through a low threshold for Gateway referral under the Early Intervention pathway, and particularly by defining what signposting to appropriate support should be available from Hub staff in the event of a Gateway referral indicating no risk of homelessness.
- 17.** Embed robust information sharing mechanisms, built on identified good practice and consider using WASPI framework to ensure clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders in data management and information sharing.
- 18.** Reform regular multi-agency meetings to plan joint approach to engage "hard to reach" service users.
- 19.** Consider what changes can be made to current IT systems (e.g. Gateway) to increase access to relevant information for partner providers and avoid repetition for service users.
- 20.** Nurture strategic and mutually beneficial partnerships by creating individually tailored service level agreements with each potential partner organisation.

7.4 Service User Involvement

To centre the delivery and development of the Hub on the experiences of people with lived experience of using housing services:

- 21.** Adopt co-production principles where possible and use the Ladder of Co-Production to make sure involvement is appropriate while also being ambitious.
- 22.** TCBC to consider commissioning a broader, ongoing service user and partner forum, with the aim of facilitating involvement of service users in future service planning and design at the earliest stages.
- 23.** Document all interventions and support offered by the Hub from brief signposting to longer support periods.
- 24.** TCBC and the Pearl House service provider to co-produce a reporting and monitoring process to demonstrate how the Hub adds value, in particular by conducting end-to-end monitoring to track success in joint working; consider this in service level agreements where possible.
- 25.** TCBC to identify what is needed within the Hub and beyond by engaging in blame free conversations with commissioned services.
- 26.** Utilise qualitative feedback to understand service user and partner perspectives and value added.
- 27.** Encourage and value all methods of feedback and engagement.
- 28.** Ensure the Pearl House Management Board is representative of the range of stakeholders for the project, including people with lived experience, in terms of both membership and equity of involvement.

Appendix A

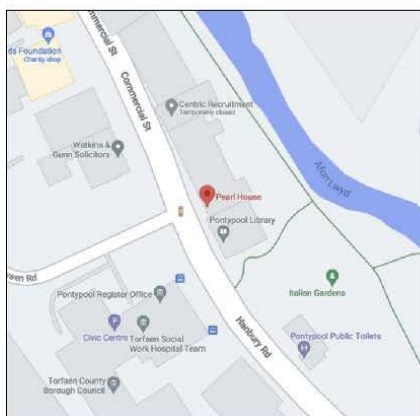
Summary of Service Specification for Torfaen's Advice, Accommodation and Support Hub



Pearl House Advice, Accommodation and Support Hub

The Pearl House Hub will be a new partnership project in Torfaen to offer citizens housing advice and support alongside other support options. It is funded by the local Housing Support Grant and is part of the approach to achieving Torfaen Council's vision that:

"Everyone who lives in Torfaen has a home that meets their needs and the necessary support and assistance to lead a fulfilling life."



The Hub will be in Pontypool on Hanbury Road, opposite the Torfaen Council office and next door to The Wallich office.

It will consist of some supported accommodation units *and* an open-access support space that aims to bring together staff from different organizations and professions. The service is designed to work with people in Torfaen who are over 16, homeless or at risk of homelessness. This could include people who are:

- Sofa surfing
- Street homeless
- Staying with friends or family
- Looking for support to prevent homelessness

There is currently a tender process so that the council can choose which organisation will run the Hub and manage the staff. The accommodation is being built by Melin Homes who will be the landlord.

Supported Accommodation

There will be 15 flats at Pearl House for people in need of short-term supported accommodation. Residents could live here for up to 6 months; each flat will be self-contained but support from staff will be available 24/7. The accommodation will have a separate entrance to the Hub entrance.

There will be:

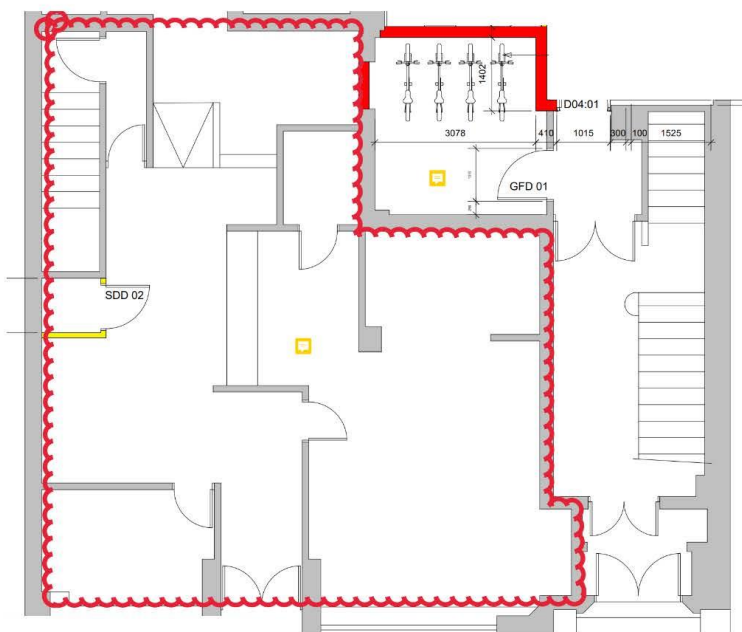
- Two 2-bedroom units
- Eight 1-bedroom units
- Five smaller 1-bedroom units

The aim is for residents to move on to independent accommodation or longer-term supported accommodation as appropriate. There may be times people are moved into temporary accommodation when needed. If someone has lived at the Pearl House accommodation for 6 months but would benefit from further support and there is no suitable supported accommodation available, they may be able to stay for a longer time.

Open-Access Support Hub

Anyone who is homeless or believes they are at risk of homelessness can access the Hub without needing a referral. It will be open as a drop-in for housing advice and support from Monday to Friday 8:30am – 5pm.

The regular staff will be a Triage Worker and a Hub Co-Ordinator. They will be aiming to support people with their housing needs while helping them to work with other relevant services. These could be health services, probation, substance misuse support, local community groups, or other appropriate options. They will also be working to build partnerships with these other services locally.



The council hope that some of these other services will work closely with the Hub to make staff available. In this way, people using the Hub could more easily access a wider network of support.

The council housing team will have staff based in the Hub each day and there will be space for other services to have staff available in-person, by phone or via video call.

The council expect the organisation running the Hub to set up a service-user forum to keep getting feedback from people.

There is a detailed service specification document available for the Pearl House project.
This summary has been written by Shelter Cymru staff with information from the longer document.

Appendix B

Initial Survey for Service Users



Torfaen Housing Services

Independent research conducted by Shelter Cymru

The purpose of this survey

You are invited to take part in this survey because we want to understand your experience of accessing housing-related support from Torfaen local authority (the council).

Your feedback will help to shape how the council in Torfaen work with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

What taking part involves

The nine questions will help us to understand your experience of accessing housing-related support in Torfaen and how you think things could work differently in future.

The survey should take around 15 minutes.

Taking part is completely voluntary and will not affect any ongoing support you receive from the council. You do not have to answer all of the questions if you do not want to and you can withdraw your participation at any point when completing the survey.

Your data

As part of the survey, you will have the option to give your contact details if you would like to be involved in the future of this project or any work with Shelter Cymru. These details will be stored separately to your other survey answers when the data is reviewed and will only be used for the purposes that you agree to during this survey.

Your responses to the survey questions will be anonymous. The anonymous data will be held indefinitely and will be used to produce a report and a presentation. All data will be stored in line with the General Data Protection Regulations and Shelter Cymru's own policies.

If you have any questions after the survey you can contact the researchers at **getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk**

I understand the information provided and am happy to take part in this survey

☐ I understand



Torfaen Housing Services

YOUR EXPERIENCE

1. I was confident about where to go to access housing-related support.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

1a. What happened to make you feel this way?

1b. What do you think could have been done differently?

2. I was treated with courtesy, respect and understanding when accessing housing-related support from the local authority.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2a. What happened to make you feel this way?

2b. What do you think could have been done differently?

3. I felt safe and welcomed when accessing housing-related support from the local authority.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3a. What happened to make you feel this way?

3b. What do you think could have been done differently?

4. The local authority contacted me when they said they would and I was kept informed of my case.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4a. What happened to make you feel this way?

4b. What do you think could have been done differently?

5. I felt supported by the local authority staff while using the service.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5a. What happened to make you feel this way?

5b. What do you think could have been done differently?

6. Which methods of communication do you feel comfortable using to access housing-related support? **Please tick all that apply**

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ In-person meeting at an office or hub | ☐ E-mail |
| ☐ In-person meeting in a community space | ☐ Text message / SMS |
| ☐ In-person meeting at the place I am living | ☐ Online chat - text only |
| ☐ Telephone call | ☐ Online chat - video only |
| ☐ Letter | |

6a. Of these, which is the most important to you?

6b. Please tell us why you feel that way.

7. I was connected to other support that was appropriate for me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7a. If you agree, what support were you connected to that you found helpful?

7b. If you disagree, what support would have been helpful and appropriate for you?

8. After receiving housing-related support from the local authority, I felt that I was unlikely to be at risk of homelessness for at least the next six months.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8a. What happened to make you feel this way?

8b. What do you think could have been done differently?

9. I felt the housing-related advice and help I had from the local authority was appropriate to my situation.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

9a. What happened to make you feel this way?

9b. What do you think could have been done differently?

YOUR ONGOING INVOLVEMENT

Thank you so much for answering the questions provided.

As someone who has used Torfaen's housing services and experienced housing difficulties, your views can help make a difference to others in a similar situation.

10a. Would you be interested in being involved in any future work that helps shape Torfaen's housing services?

☐ Yes

☐ No

10b. Would you be interested in being involved in Shelter Cymru's ongoing Fight for Home?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you have answered **YES** to either of the above, please enter your contact information below.

Your details will not be passed on to any third party without your consent.

Name	
Address	
Address	
City/Town	
Postcode	
Email Address	
Phone Number	

EQUALITIES INFORMATION

Shelter Cymru believes that everyone in Wales should have a decent home. We are committed to promoting equality and inclusion in upholding our organisational values and achieving our mission, strategy and objectives.

To understand how representative the data we have collected in this survey is, and to ensure we are considering the views of diverse groups, we ask you to complete the following questions.

However, all of these questions are optional and you can tick 'prefer not to say' if you do not wish to not share this information with us.

Please select your age from the following categories:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ☐ 16-17 | ☐ 35-54 |
| ☐ 18-25 | ☐ 55+ |
| ☐ 26-34 | ☐ Prefer not to say |

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Do you have any physical or mental health conditions lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your ethnic background?

Other (please specify if you wish)

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- ☐ Straight/ Heterosexual
- ☐ Gay or Lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Other (please specify if you wish)

- ☐ Prefer not to say



Torfaen Housing Services

AN INVITATION

As part of our work with Torfaen Council, we are having an in-person event on **Wednesday 30th August at 2pm at the Civic Centre, Glantorvaen Rd, Pontypool, NP4 6YN.**

There will be spaces for open conversation and activities to continue shaping housing support in Torfaen.

Refreshments will be provided.

If you would like to receive a text message or an email as a reminder to the event, and haven't provided your details above, please enter your details below.

If you have any questions about the event or this survey you can reach us at **getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk**

Thank you so much for your participation.

Email Address

Phone Number

Appendix C

HUB Operational Concept Document

Advice, Accommodation and Support HUB

The HUB

The HUB is designed to be a central point for individuals to seek advice and support around their accommodation needs. The HUB will be led by a voluntary sector agency who will co-ordinate the overall operation.

The HUB will have a walk in service available throughout the week and will provide accommodation with support to 16 individuals. Agencies will have a presence at the HUB either physically or virtually. Agencies will include:

- Torfaen Housing
- RSL's
- Support Providers
- Advice agencies (CAB, Shelter Cymru)
- Probation
- YOS
- Social Care
- Health

Physical presence will be co-ordinated by the HUB lead agency and will in the main be covered through Torfaen Housing and Support Providers. Other agencies may, where there is capacity or a need, may also have a physical presence. All agencies will need to ensure that a virtual presence is available for the opening times of the HUB.

How the Service will operate

Individuals in need of assistance relating to their accommodation issues will be directed to the HUB either in person or through either a telephone call or through a virtual link (for example – Microsoft Teams). An initial assessment will be made to ascertain the best course of action and which pathway will be best suited to the circumstances the individual is presenting with.

Early Intervention Pathway

Individuals may present with accommodation related issues that are not necessarily placing them at risk of being made homeless. In these instances, individuals may require support to address their issues. An assessment will be made through the Gateway service and an appropriate service will be allocated to the individual so that support can be provided at the earliest opportunity. This may involve diverting an individual to other services to provide support and interventions to assist them.

However, where the support and interventions provided fail then a referral will need to be made into the Prevention Pathway.

Prevention Pathway

Anyone who is at risk of being made homeless will need to be referred into the prevention pathway. This will involve a full assessment by the Housing Solutions team under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Officers will seek to prevent homelessness from occurring wherever this is possible and reasonable to do so.

Accommodation Pathway

Where individuals are either actually homeless or homelessness cannot be prevented then a referral will need to be made into the accommodation pathway. This will be administered through a combination of the Housing Team and the Gateway Team. Referrals for accommodation will need to be made in the first instance to the Temporary Accommodation Team who will then source accommodation for the individual concerned and any members of their family who reside with them. This may be within the temporary accommodation managed by the Council, through the provision at Pearl House or through private accommodation arranged for by the Council.

In all instances, individuals will have a support and accommodation assessment undertaken in order to ascertain what their needs are. This will determine where an individual will be placed.

For example, an individual placed into Pearl House will be assessed and the result may be that they need supported accommodation. A referral will then be made for supported accommodation and they will remain in Pearl House until a suitable unit becomes available. On the other hand there may well not be a need for supported housing and as such the individual would, in this case, be moved into temporary accommodation provided by the Council as soon as a suitable unit of accommodation becomes available.

Families ill invariably be placed into temporary accommodation managed by the Council directly and will then be assisted to move on into more permanent accommodation. Support may be provided should this be necessary.