

Torfaen County Borough Council
Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy

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Part 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and Purpose

This document sets out Torfaen County Borough Council's policy and strategy in relation to private sector renewal, and the provision of financial assistance and other forms of assistance that the Council is able to offer qualifying residents. This document has been developed in response to the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, and is a fully revised version of the original Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy & Policy of 2003. It will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The Regulatory Reform Order on Housing Renewal came into force in July 2002. This Order had important implications for Local Authorities as it repealed much of the original prescriptive legislation governing the provision of housing renewal grants, and replaced it with a revised wide-ranging power allowing Local Authorities to provide assistance for housing renewal. The Order affords Local Authorities a much greater degree of flexibility in devising strategies to deal with poor conditions within the private sector, both in relation to developing a range of policy tools and improving the ability to work in partnership with others.

Local Authorities wishing to make use of these flexible opportunities afforded by the Order must produce and publish a policy that details how the powers are to be used. The Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy 2011 meets this requirement.

The Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy allows the Local Authority to:

- Adopt a policy that includes details of the provision of assistance under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform Order 2002
- Give notice to the public of the adoption of the policy
- Ensure that a copy of the full policy document is available for inspection free of charge at all reasonable times at their principle office

In developing its Housing Renewal Policy and Strategy, Torfaen County Borough Council is keen to ensure that it does not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against anyone. The Council aims to comply with the statutory requirements relating to the Equality Act 2010 and all other relevant equalities legislation and to promote best practice with regards to the prevention of discrimination and promotion of equality.

The AIMS OF THE HOUSING RENEWAL POLICY & STRATEGY

are to:

- Improve the quality and condition of private sector housing in Torfaen
- Reduce the health and safety risks and hazards associated with poor housing
- Promote sustainable communities through environmental, economic and social regeneration and development
- Maximize the positive impact of housing and neighbourhood renewal by working collaboratively with stakeholders and partners
- Reduce fuel poverty and energy inefficiency across households
- Contribute towards the development of other key strategies, plans and initiatives

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1.2 The County of Torfaen

Torfaen is the most easterly of the South Wales Valleys with an estimated population of 90,720, and includes the three urban centres of Pontypool, Blaenavon and Cwmbran.

The development of Pontypool and Blaenavon stemmed from the presence of coal and iron deposits in the area, which enabled the communities to prosper. However, with the decline of these industries, the areas suffered social and economic downturn. The challenge for the North of the County Borough is therefore to reverse this decline by promoting its industrial heritage and environmental assets, by encouraging social inclusion and learning opportunities, and by taking proactive action in housing renewal. Recent projects to regenerate these areas are showing notable successes.

In contrast, Cwmbran, the most southerly settlement, has been the focal point of growth since its New Town status in 1949. Cwmbran is the largest of the urban settlements and is characterised by industrial and high quality commercial investors. The challenges facing Cwmbran is to diversify its economic base and to address the social decline of its

communities located in the Southwest areas which contain areas of real social deprivation.

Torfaen has a housing stock of circa 39,500 dwellings, 73% of which are within the private sector (67% owner occupied, 6% privately rented). The most common housing type in Torfaen is terraced, which makes up 44% of the total housing stock, the rest compiling 28% semi detached, 17% detached and 11% flats.

In terms of age structure, the population composition of Torfaen is similar to that of Wales as a whole. The predominant age group within Torfaen is 35-59, but the most common household composition is one person pensioners, reflected in the 21% of the population who are of retirement age. At present, 0.9% of the population is made up of residents from a non-white background.

The high levels of deprivation in some parts of Torfaen is seen in the number of residents who are economically inactive (28%) and those of working age who are claiming benefits (19%). In addition, 16.5% of the working age population have no qualifications, further reducing their ability to access employment. Two of the boroughs Lower Super Output Areas (an area of approximately 1500 people which is used to measure deprivation) are currently ranked in the top 10% most deprived in Wales and 12 are ranked in the top 20%. Overall, 57% of the Lower Super Output Areas in Torfaen are more deprived than the Welsh average. The average earnings in Torfaen are currently £428 per week, which is below the regional average of £445.

1.3 The Strategic Context

The Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy cannot be successfully implemented in Torfaen in isolation from other key strategies, policies and plans. Embedded throughout this document is the principle of adopting a partnership approach for the development and implementation of housing renewal and other regeneration initiatives. The Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy pays particular attention to aligning with other local, regional and national strategies, ensuring that a more rounded and robust approach is achieved in order to maximize investment and regeneration opportunities to improve the positive outcomes for the communities and citizens of Torfaen. The policy captures the principles of sustainability whereby housing renewal must be focused on increasing societal, environmental and economic improvements across the borough.

All of the following strategies, plans and partnerships contribute to the contextual framework for housing renewal, and also demonstrate how housing renewal contributes to wider strategic agendas.

Torfaen County Borough Council Corporate Plan 2 (2011 – 2016)

Extensive consultation is undertaken during the production of the Corporate Plan 2, to ensure that Torfaen makes the right choices for improving quality of life for its citizens. The Plan outlines the Council's commitment to delivering the Torfaen Community Strategy and sets out seven priorities that it seeks to achieve. Through investment into private sector housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy will play a vital part in ensuring these priorities are met and enabling the Corporate Plan to achieve its vision of making Torfaen 'a safe, prosperous, sustainable place where everyone has the opportunity to be the best they can be'.

Torfaen County Borough Council Community Strategy

The priorities of the Torfaen Community Strategy were developed as a result of discussions with the communities of Torfaen. The Community Strategy is the work of the Torfaen Partnership, an alliance of partners which aims to shape the future of Torfaen and make it a place where people want to live. The Community Strategy is based on the following themes:

- Health & Wellbeing
- Safe Communities
- Education & Training for Life
- Economy, Jobs and Business
- Environment and Transport
- Housing & Homelessness
- Working Together & Active Citizenship

The Housing Renewal Strategy feeds into many of these themes and can support the Community Strategy in achieving its main purpose: 'Creating opportunities that enable people to make decisions that will improve quality of life in Torfaen'.

A new Community Strategy for 2011 – 2025 is under development and will focus on defining statements of strategic planning intent and priorities for public services in the Torfaen area. It plans to set out the overarching vision and strategic direction of the Local Service Board, its aspirations and priorities, and in this respect is the reference point for all other plans.

Local Development Plan (LDP)

Torfaen's Forward Planning Team is currently working on finalising the LDP, as required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The LDP sets out the Council's intentions for the development and use of land within Torfaen. The vision of the LDP has evolved through consultation workshops with key stakeholders and the priorities of the LDP have been devised to deliver (through the use of land), the objectives contained in the Torfaen Community Strategy vision. It is anticipated that as the LDP is adopted it will replace previous plans governing development in Torfaen.

Health, Social Care and Well Being Strategy (HSC&WB)

The Torfaen HSC&WB Strategy is a joint strategy between Torfaen County Borough Council, Aneurin Bevan Health Board, Gwent Police, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance and the third sector, which focuses on improving health and well-being in Torfaen. The strategy identifies that improving health and well-being is a shared responsibility across organizations and that public services need to contribute more effectively to this process.

The Strategy recognizes that there are strong links between health and housing. Through the regeneration and improvements currently taking place in the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, the Renewal Strategy will directly support the HSC&WB Strategy to achieve many of its priorities for improving the health and well being of local residents.

Local Housing Strategy

The Local Housing Strategy sets out the Council's priorities on how to meet housing requirements in Torfaen. The strategy acknowledges that housing cannot be considered in isolation, and the aims and objectives that it sets out, demonstrate the wider role that housing plays in creating communities in which people want to live.

The Renewal Strategy will play a major role in delivering the aims of the housing strategy, by directly contributing to the improvement of homes and communities within Torfaen.

Affordable Housing Delivery Statement

The Affordable Housing Delivery Statement (AHDS) is an interim document that sets out the direction and targets for affordable housing in Torfaen, linking to the adoption of the Local Development Plan in 2012. The AHDS is based on the findings of the Affordable Housing Viability Study, and is primarily concerned with setting and achieving an affordable housing target. It supports the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment that 'everyone should have the opportunity to buy a decent home that they can afford, in a place where they want to live'. Creating places where people want to live is important, and through the regeneration of local areas, the Housing Renewal Strategy will play a vital part in improving communities and helping to make them attractive places to live.

Empty Property Strategy

The Empty Property Strategy sets out how the Council plans to reduce the number of long-term empty properties that are having a detrimental effect upon the communities in which they are situated, and ensuring that these valuable assets are brought back into use. The Public Health Team oversee much of the activity relating to empty properties, but to achieve the objectives of the Strategy, close partnership working with housing and other sectors has been necessary to ensure a coordinated approach. The role of the Housing Renewal Strategy is particularly important in helping to bring empty properties

back into use, a notable recent success being the redevelopment of Boot Lane in Blaenavon.

The Housing Service has recently launched its Empty Hopes initiative as a dedicated advice and guidance service for property owners to support them to bring their empty property back into use. Various options are explained to empty property home owners such as advice on selling, letting and auctioning their property, along side guidance upon renovation opportunities, the use of tradespersons and the planning system. There is much interest in the service and the initiative plays an important role in the implementation of the Housing Renewal Strategy.

Disabled Persons Service/Disabled Facilities Grant Eligibility Criteria Policy

The Disabled People's Service provides a single point of access to meet the social care and housing needs of disabled people in Torfaen. The service brings together social workers, occupational therapists and housing professionals, to address issues of accessibility and ensure that suitable adaptations are made to people's homes, giving them the support that will enable them to live full and independent lives.

The Disabled People's Service has responsibility for administering the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), a means-tested local government grant that helps towards the cost of adapting a person's home and enabling them to continue living there. The Housing Renewal team works closely with DPS to implement housing renewal grants alongside DFGs where applicable.

National Housing Strategy

The aim of the National Housing Strategy is summarized in its title, 'Improving Lives and Communities'. To achieve this, the following approach is adopted:

- Provide more housing of the right type and offer more choice
- Improve houses and communities, including the energy efficiency of new and existing homes
- Improve housing related services and support, particularly for vulnerable people and people from minority groups

Whilst acknowledging the challenges that will be faced, the strategy identifies the wider benefits of investing in housing: the economic impact, health benefits and the impact that housing regeneration can have on communities. Housing Renewal will be particularly important in helping to achieve these objectives in Torfaen, especially through the regeneration of the private sector and Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, which are directly responsible for improving houses and communities. As well as improving the quality of private sector homes, housing renewal is focussed on improving the energy efficiency of properties, also having an impact upon fuel poverty.

Fuel Poverty Strategy 2010

It is estimated that 320,000 households in Wales have to spend 10% or more of their income on heating their homes adequately. The Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act which was passed in 2000 and the Welsh Assembly Government, A Fuel Poverty Commitment for Wales published in 2003, set out the intention to end fuel poverty in Wales by 2018.

The Act emphasized the role that housing renewal can play in reducing fuel poverty, through the integration of energy efficiency into Renewal Strategies and working with other local organisations in promoting energy efficiency. In 2010, the Welsh Assembly Government published a Fuel Poverty Strategy which reaffirmed the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to eradicating fuel poverty in Wales by 2018 and set out how it intended to achieve this.

In Torfaen, the Energy Manager is able to provide advice to the public on how to make properties more energy efficient. The Energy Manager works with partners (Housing Renewal, Torfaen Care and Repair and the South East Wales Energy Efficiency Advice Centre) to promote energy efficiency and to advise residents on the availability of grants and assistance that may be available.

Torfaen Regeneration Strategy

The Torfaen Regeneration Strategy guides the regeneration of Torfaen so that it supports and feeds into the overarching aims of the Community Strategy. The regeneration strategy identifies the need to have clear working relationships with other local plans and strategies, providing a framework for regeneration activities. The strategy recognizes that cross-cutting themes need to be adopted to effectively deliver the strategy, the same themes emphasised by the Welsh Assembly; sustainability, equal opportunities, social inclusion and promoting take-up of ICT. To accomplish this, the strategy will work in partnership with other service areas, including housing, health, education and public protection amongst others. The Regeneration Strategy aims to improve the quality of life, build a strong economy, give people the ability to secure good jobs, tackle social exclusion, revitalise community life and restore the local environments, both natural and man-made.

Pontypool Town Centre Regeneration Strategy

The Pontypool Town Centre Regeneration Strategy seeks to improve the prospects of the town through an all-encompassing approach embracing physical protection and enhancement, economic strengthening and greater social opportunity. The Strategy establishes a clear direction and role for the town centre over the next 15-20 years and has identified the actions needed to give the town a vibrant and viable future.

Developing the vision and objectives for Pontypool was a combined process involving a wide range of stakeholders and members of the community. The strategy recognized that it is essential that the vision for Pontypool comes from the local community and is supported by them, so has tried to involve them at every stage of the process. The

strategy seeks to raise the profile of Pontypool, making it a desirable destination for investment and somewhere that people will choose to live, work or visit.

With Pontypool as a designated Neighbourhood Renewal Area, considerable housing renewal investment has been targeted at the area, making a large contribution to the delivery of the strategy. This investment has also supported other bids for the regeneration initiatives across the area, including the Pontypool Townscape Heritage Initiative.

Townscape Heritage Initiative

The Pontypool Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) is a regeneration scheme which will operate in Pontypool Town Centre and run for five years. During the scheme, many of Pontypool's historic buildings will be repaired and given a new lease of life, leading to an improvement of the town's general appearance. The THI programme will support strategic action to address the problems of decline, disrepair, and underuse of historic buildings, by offering grant assistance. The THI will also provide a number of additional activities including training to improve conservation skills and developing educational resources to promote knowledge and appreciation of Pontypool's heritage. Through these projects, the THI will contribute to the economy, sustainability, vitality and confidence of the community. Co-ordinating work in the Pontypool Renewal Area with other schemes in the area is important for ensuring a consistent approach to regeneration.

Heads of the Valley Initiative

This is a 15 year regeneration project to make the region an increasingly successful and attractive area for people to live, work and play. Led by the Welsh Assembly Government, the initiative is working with local authorities and many other organisations to benefit communities in Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

A total of £140 million investment has been ring fenced for the region and will be used to stimulate regeneration, economic growth, and environmental improvements. This money is in addition to the funding already made in the area by the Welsh Assembly Government, councils and other organisations, and will act as a catalyst to attract other funding and private sector investment.

By linking with key partners, including Local Authorities, we are able to understand the needs of local people and plan projects that will have a positive and lasting impact on communities. To date a total of £10m has been allocated for town centre improvement projects and large scale environmental projects in each of the five Local Authorities.

Heads of the Valley funding is also used to help people back into work, provide skills training, make the region cleaner and greener and help make our towns' safer places. It supports a range of projects from voluntary groups and community enterprises, and can include small scale projects which are all making a difference. These range from grants given to improve community facilities to funding for housing associations to install money saving renewable energy features into older homes they are renovating.

The Housing Renewal Team work collaboratively with partners from the Heads of the Valley Initiative to support improvements in Torfaen.

Torfaen Energy Partnership

The Torfaen Energy Partnership was established in 2010 to share information, identify and maximise funding opportunities and increase skills and training in the renewable energy and insulation sector. The partnership aims to reduce fuel poverty and the carbon footprint of Torfaen, also increasing local training, jobs and skills. The partnership works together to identify the best approach for achieving its objectives and to target and co-ordinate investment and resources.

South East Wales Energy Partnership (SEWEP) Housing Sub Group

SEWEP is a partnership between Local Authorities, Registered Social Landlords, the Welsh Assembly Government and other key stakeholders in the South East Wales area. The Housing subgroup was established to share best practice across the region, to make links with other relevant policy areas and to implement sustainable Housing energy policies and strategies to reduce carbon emissions. The partnership aims to combine resources and seek investment opportunities for the implementation of Housing Renewal energy projects on a regional basis.

1.4 The Evidence Base

To ensure that the Housing Renewal Strategy is targeted towards the most deprived and disadvantaged areas in Torfaen, it is important for there to be a robust and comprehensive evidence base. This evidence base is made up of a number of sources, all of which help to create an overall picture of where there are areas of need that would most benefit from housing renewal investment in Torfaen. For salience, in this section only the main evidence bases are outlined, however it is important to note that these capture an in-depth range of information and have been developed through wide consultation.

Private Sector Stock Condition Survey

The previous Private Sector Stock Condition Survey (PSSCS) was commissioned by Torfaen County Borough Council back in 2006 to provide the information about the condition and energy rating of the housing stock, as well as the socio-economic characteristics of the borough. This survey was in need of updating, especially given the recent recession and stagnancy in the housing market. To enable improvement to some of the most deprived areas in Torfaen, and to implement fair, robust and effective Renewal investment strategies across the borough, a new, independent PSSCS will act as

a much needed catalyst for further private sector housing renewal and community regeneration across Torfaen.

The new PSSCS was recently carried out by independent consultants on behalf of the Council. The survey sampled dwellings across private sector tenures excluding all social housing. The survey was based on a stratified random sample of addresses in Torfaen in order to gain a representative picture across the Borough. A sample of 1800 was drawn with, in practice, 910 surveys being undertaken during 2010 in total. To add to this, the data from a further 280 surveys undertaken in the Neighbourhood Renewal Assessments carried out in the Forgeside, Varteg and Grandiffaith and the Northville and Southville areas was used. These surveys were carried out between February to April 2009. The data in this report was therefore drawn from a total of 1,190 surveys.

Each of the 910 surveys conducted in 2010 as part of this survey contained information on the following areas:

- General characteristics of the dwelling;
- condition of the internal and external fabric;
- provision of amenities;
- compliance with the fitness standard;
- compliance with housing health and safety;
- age and type of elements;
- energy efficiency measures;
- compliance with the Welsh Housing Quality Standard
- socio-economic information about the household (where occupied).

The results of this study enables the Council to better understand the condition of dwellings in the private sector (both owner occupied and private rented), provide a baseline figure on households in fuel poverty, inform on the number of households who would benefit from the Housing Renewal service and support further development of the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy and other housing, regeneration and associated strategies.

The PSSCS is an essential evidence base for the development of a robust and effective Housing Renewal Strategy, enabling the Council to ensure valuable resources are targeted for the maximum impact creating more sustainable, cohesive and healthy communities.

Local Housing Market Assessment

The current Local Housing Market Assessment was jointly commissioned by Torfaen, Newport and Monmouth to inform local policies. In particular, the assessment is used to shape the Local Housing Strategies planning policies surrounding affordable housing provision within the counties. The assessment provides a vital insight into the levels of

housing need and identifies issues affecting local residents. The assessment found that 19,451 households across the sub-region were assessed as living in unsuitable housing due to one or more factors and that 6,122 of these households were within Torfaen. Two of the main reasons why properties were considered unsuitable are the condition of properties and the properties being too difficult to manage. 9% of households that had a serious problem with their property, said that they were responsible for the repairs, but felt that they would be unable to afford them. Torfaen's Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy is vital to tackling the poor condition of private sector housing and the Housing Renewal service regularly provide advice and assistance to support residents who are struggling to manage in their homes.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2008 (WIMD)

The WIMD is the official measure of deprivation for Wales and was designed to model levels of deprivation and support the objective targeting of resources. The WIMD identifies eight types of deprivation: income, employment, health, education, housing, physical environment, access to services and community safety.

Deprivation is recorded locally using 'Lower Layer Super Output Areas' (LSOAs). There are 1,896 LSOAs across Wales and comparison of Torfaen with Wales as a whole shows that Torfaen is ranked with 4 other councils as exhibiting a 'high level' of deprivation, with 57% of Torfaen's LSOAs falling into the 50% most deprived across Wales. The WIMD plays an important role in helping the Council to identify potential Renewal Areas, a process which involves carrying out a social and economic assessment of an area.

Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) Assessments

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) are a key feature of the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy. A NRA is one identified as having poor housing conditions, coupled with social, economic and environmental needs. The aim is to halt the decline of an area and increase public confidence, by improving housing and environmental conditions, renovating and maintaining properties and creating attractive places in which people want to live. NRA improvements to the infrastructure and environment also bring wider benefits to an area by stimulating the local economy. NRAs have been particularly successful in Wales in addressing housing issues alongside wider socio-economic and environmental improvements. A recent review of Renewal Areas by the Welsh Assembly Government has found that they have led to an increase in leisure, tourism and commercial activity, they have contributed to the improvement of community facilities and they have helped to tackle issues of anti-behaviour and fear of crime. A NRA is found to:

- focus activity and investment on areas that combine a need for assistance with potential regeneration
- secure improvements to private sector housing, but also to environmental, social and economic conditions
- tackle social exclusion, deprivation, crime and fear of crime
- build communities, promotes sustainability and restores confidence in an area

A NRA is declared formally by the Local Authority and runs for a 10 year period. Prior to the declaration of a new NRA, the Welsh Assembly Government requires that a full NRA assessment and consultation process is undertaken, and this requires approval from the Council. The NRA Assessment forms an essential evidence base for targeting and attracting regeneration and investment in specifically designated areas, and for working collaboratively with a broad range of partners to achieve maximum successes over a longer-term duration.

Three new NRAs have recently been declared in Torfaen and this has followed much consultation with a variety of stakeholders including local residents, Elected Members, professionals and also draws upon information from a wide range of groups, evidence bases and relevant literature. An important part of this strategy will be to measure the socio, economic and environmental baselines of the NRAs, and the impact upon them following the combined investment in their regeneration. During and at the end of the NRA terms, benefits realisation studies will be undertaken in these areas to assess the impact upon the households and communities. More detailed information about NRAs is provided in the next section of this document. Findings from the NRA Assessments help the Local Authority develop its strategy to target housing renewal resources and works at the properties, streets, communities and environments that are most in need.

Empty Properties

Empty properties are currently recorded and monitored by Torfaen Council and enforcement action (please see section 2) can be taken on any property found to be insecure or creating a nuisance. Council Tax provides much of the data on empty properties, which can then be plotted on the Corporate GIS Mapping system, providing a visual indication of the location of all the empty properties in Borough. This data along with information collated by the Housing Service through the Empty Hopes initiative acts as an important evidence base for the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy, with empty properties often being encountered in the NRAs. Housing Renewal has a significant role to play in helping to bring properties back into use, through the use of the different housing grants that are currently available (see section 3).

1.5 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

Following the successful completion and exit of the Blaenavon and Abersychan Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA) in 2009, there are now four NRAs in Torfaen lasting for a period of ten years (Please see page 13 for further information on NRAs).

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	Period	Status
Blaenavon	Mar 1999 – Mar 2009	Complete
Abersychan	Nov 1999 – Nov 2009	Complete
Pontypool	Aug 2003 - Aug 2013	Complete
Forgeside	Dec 2009 – Dec 2019	Ongoing
Varteg & Garndiffaith	Dec 2009 – Dec 2019	Ongoing
Northville & Southville	Mar 2010 – Mar 2020	Ongoing

Pontypool

The Pontypool Renewal Area was formally declared in 2003 following a NRA Assessment which found that whilst the Council and its partners had been targeting resources towards the regeneration of Pontypool, those resources were insufficient to deal with the many problems that existed. Declaration of a renewal area was therefore seen as the means to ending the decline that was apparent in many parts of the community. The assessment found that housing predating 1919 made up a significant proportion of the total dwellings in Pontypool and that 40% of the stock was found to be in need of repair. Income levels were low and a high proportion of households were in receipt of benefits.

Forgeside

The opening of ‘Big Pit’ (now a working mining museum) gave birth to the neighbourhood of Forgeside, which was constructed along with the pit in the latter half of the 19th century. It is adjacent to the mine workings but due to the topography and a disused railway line, it has become a somewhat ‘isolated’ and self-contained community. Due to its industrial history, a high percentage (85.6%) of the properties in Forgeside date to before 1919 and nearly all of the properties (92.9%) are terraced. When assessed against the Welsh Housing Quality Standard regulations, all the properties failed to meet the requirements. In addition, the NRA Assessment identified a number of community issues which were affecting the area and were a concern to local residents. These included problems with traffic and parking, the need for improved play facilities and amenities, and enhancing the environment in general. Despite the problems identified, Forgeside remains the community of choice for the majority of residents, with 86.6% of those surveyed, stating that they had no intention of moving in the next 5 years.

Varteg and Garndiffaith

Varteg and Garndiffaith form a contiguous housing area of mixed property types with different tenures. Varteg consists mainly of former Local Authority housing, and a few terraces which are much older (pre 1919), whilst Garndiffaith consists of a former estate in the north and larger (many detached) private houses and bungalows in the south. Approximately two thirds of the council houses have been purchased by tenants under ‘right to buy’; whilst the remainder were transferred in 2008 under the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer programme to Bron Afon Housing Association. Many of the houses in private ownership require attention, particularly in respect of energy efficiency measures. A high percentage of properties in these areas fail to meet WHQS and many have HHSRS category 1 and 2 hazards. Yet despite the poor housing conditions, these

areas, like Forgeside, remain the community of choice for residents with a low rate of migration and 76.6% of residents saying that they had no intention to move in the next 5 years.

Northville and Southville

These neighbourhoods form 2 significant housing areas flanking the town of Cwmbran and arose with the development of Cwmbran as a new town. Most of the properties were previously in the ownership of the Local Authority, but many tenants have since exercised their 'right to buy', which has given rise to the 'mixed tenure' estates that exist today (a 60/40% split of owner occupier and social tenant). In 2008, the remaining 40% of social housing stock was transferred to Bron Afon Housing Association.

The majority of housing in the two neighbourhoods consists of terraced and semi-detached houses, with some low rise flats. In addition, however, Southville contains 'The Towers' one of the multi storey tower blocks in Torfaen. The majority of residents in the neighbourhood have lived there for over five years and when asked where they would choose to live if they were to move, most would prefer to stay in their respective neighbourhoods. However, whilst many of the residents said that they like their properties, they also acknowledged that property conditions needed improving. Many of the issues relate to properties being of poor construction with high levels of thermal inefficiencies.

Consultation

Prior to declaring a Neighbourhood Renewal Area, certain criteria must be met. Much of this can be achieved through the production of a NRA Assessment. The assessment examines the different options that are available in a potential renewal area and the results are used to inform the Council as to whether declaring a renewal area is the most effective way forward. The assessment gathers information in a variety of ways including, house condition surveys, resident questionnaires, 'drop in days' and 'environmental walkabouts,' which provide residents with the chance to identify concerns that they have in their communities. The NRA Assessment provides the Council with a robust evidence base that can be used by the Council to decide the best options available for an area.

Declarations

Once the Council is satisfied a Neighbourhood Renewal Area is the best approach to improving an area, a formal declaration is required. To ensure that Renewal Areas are used properly, certain safeguards are required. In particular, the declaration process must first meet the criteria laid down by the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act as amended by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. Only if the proposed Renewal Area meets these criteria can the Local Authority declare it a Renewal Area. The criteria that need to be met are:

- A social and economic assessment.

- An authority can satisfy itself that a Renewal Area is the most effective way of improving living conditions in the area.
- Consultation with local residents is undertaken before declaring a Renewal Area and the declaration is published.
- Local residents must be kept informed throughout the process and must be notified of any changes to the original declaration.
- A period for which the area will be declared must be given.
- Decisions to exclude land from, or wind up a Renewal Area, must be consulted with and notified to the local community.

All these criteria have been met by Torfaen County Borough Council and the Housing Renewal team set the NRA programmes of works on an annual basis in accordance with available funding. With the limited resources available to invest in NRAs over their 10 year duration, findings from the NRA Assessments are used to inform the Local Authority's Housing Renewal Strategy aiming to target resources and works at the most in need properties, streets, communities and environments.

1.6 Resources

Specific Capital Grant

Following the recession and the recent Government Comprehensive Spending Review it is clear that there are extremely limited resources available to the public sector. Much of the success of the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy is subject to the availability of capital funding for investment into private sector housing grants and other products that can be used for private sector housing renewal and associated works. Torfaen Housing Renewal Team currently relies heavily on Specific Capital Grant (SCG) to subsidise the Housing Renewal programme of works. This is allocated annually by the Welsh Assembly Government following a prescribed Local Authority bidding process. Specific Capital Grant can only be used to invest in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. (Please refer to section 1.5).

In considering the allocation of Specific Capital Grant (SCG), the Welsh Assembly Government takes into account a number of factors, including the extent to which a bid is realistic, achievable and meets the objectives of the Renewal Area. The Welsh Assembly Government also takes account of past performance in using SCG, and the aims and priorities that the Local Authority has identified in their Housing Renewal Strategy and Local Housing Strategies.

SCG can only be used in a NRA, and use is at the discretion of the Local Authority. It is allocated to the Authority on the basis of timing and the declaration of those programmes indicated in the initial bid. Therefore if timescales are not met or there are

difficulties with NRAs which impact on grant expenditure, Local Authorities must notify the Welsh Assembly Government immediately. In particular, SCG cannot be paid in advance, so a Neighbourhood Renewal Area must be formally declared before grant funding will be made available.

SCG is not allocated for individual NRAs, so the Local Authority can set the priorities and decide which activities should be supported from the grant allocated. However, whilst the Local Authority has control over the grant, SCG can only be used for capital purposes.

Ideally SCG should be supplemented by funding from the Local Authority's General Capital Fund, which will enable Authorities to plan work in both existing and future NRAs and ensure that local priorities area met, especially in areas where there may be difficulties completing work within the life of the NRA.

Torfaen Housing Renewal team bid for SCG from the Welsh Assembly Government on an annual basis and for 2010/11 were awarded £1.4m and in 2011/12 were awarded £925k. (This is a 2 year reduction from 2009/10's allocation of £1.6m) This is likely to reduce again in 2012/13 pending Welsh Assembly Government's final budget announcements on the SCG pot for allocation across Wales.

General Capital Fund

General Capital Funding is the core funding that Local Authorities receive from the Welsh Assembly Government and can be used by the Authorities for any purpose they decide in delivering the services for which they are responsible. The General Capital Fund can be used to support investment into Housing Renewal, or other developments. In Torfaen, there is currently no General Capital Funding allocated for housing renewal.

Reducing Grant Dependency Culture

The relatively high levels of funding that were previously available for housing grants in Wales, has given rise to an increased level of grant dependency amongst private sector owners. Grant dependency develops when homeowners begin to assume that they will receive injections of financial assistance to maintain their properties. This has been evident in Torfaen, where there are recorded instances of the same homeowners applying for grants over a period of time. There has been a widespread acknowledgement that sustainable, long-term improvements in private sector housing conditions, requires an approach that discourages a dependency on public funds. So to reduce grant dependency, it has been recommended that Local Authority policy should move towards the use of loans, as an alternative form of assistance and to reassert the message that, in the majority of circumstances, owners are responsible for the maintenance and repair of their own properties.

Property Improvement Loan

In light of restrictive funding opportunities and the need to move away from grant dependency, there has been an emphasis on establishing alternative forms of finance for

the renewal, renovation, aids and adaptations of private sector housing properties. The Property Improvement loan is an interest free loan of up to £10,000, that allows eligible homeowners to access funding to make minor improvements, repairs and adaptations to their property.

A loan option helps to ensure that more owner occupiers and private landlords are able to have their housing repair and adaptation needs met where other grant funding is not applicable.

As repayments are made this provides the Council with an opportunity to recycle the fund for future loans and support increased numbers of people in the community.

The Property Improvement Loan can also be offered to Disabled Facilities Grant applicants where the works exceed the £36,000 limit.

This product is covered in more detail in Section 3.

Residential, Environmental and Commercial/Residential Works

Works undertaken by the Housing Renewal Team under the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy can broadly fall into three categories: residential; environmental; or commercial/residential. The focus and benefits of these are outlined in brief as follows.

Residential

A major focus of private sector housing renewal is to tackle housing in poor condition that displays high levels of risks and hazards. It is therefore the key priority of this policy and strategy to target works to improve the worst residential properties within communities therefore improving households and communities' health and wellbeing. Group repair and Enveloping schemes are the main tools used for carrying out improvements to residential properties.

Environmental

A key finding from the implementation of successful Neighbourhood Renewal Areas is that they can have a significant impact on the local environment and community by improving the appearance of an area. For example, improving street lighting, parking, community buildings, waste management, land/streetscaping or encouraging tree planting help to make an area a more desirable place to live and increases public and community pride. By undertaking environmental schemes considerable positive impacts can be achieved to the wider community and these are included within this policy and strategy.

Commercial

Improving commercial properties such as shops and local businesses within an area can also stimulate the economy and encourage additional investment into the community. Assisting in the improvement of commercial properties brings about numerous benefits such as jobs creation, reductions of empty properties, increased tourism and commercial

activity all helping to regenerate an area. Works to commercial residential properties are included within this policy and strategy.

The Local Authority is continually seeking opportunities to generate investment for housing renewal.

When deciding what works are prioritised current and future financial limitations must be considered alongside the volume of households and communities that would benefit. Therefore the Housing Renewal Strategy rationals and prioritises investment based upon several factors including:

- the evidence of need e.g. NRA Assessments, Private Sector Stock Condition Survey
- targeting worst first
- the grant terms and conditions and other funding restrictions that are applicable
- the ability to maximise and collaborate positive impact, benefits and outcomes
- the ability to generate further investment e.g. through partnership developments and collaboration
- contribution to other strategic priorities
- improving sustainability (environmental, economic and social)
- the grants and products available to deliver

The grants and products available are covered in part 3 of this document.

Part 2: Guidance and Legislation

2.1 Welsh Housing Quality Standards

It is important that the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy takes into account several pieces of legislation and guidance to ensure compliance with wider policy and statute.

The former National Housing Strategy, ‘Better Homes for People in Wales’ sets out the Welsh Assembly Governments vision that gives ‘all households in Wales the opportunity to live in good quality homes, which are in a good state of repair; safe and secure; adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated; contain up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms; well managed (for rented housing); located in attractive and safe environments; and, as far as possible, suit the specific requirements of the households’.

To achieve this, social housing needs to be brought up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), a standard which provides a common target and minimum standard for the physical condition that all social housing should meet by 2012. The standards stated that housing should be:

1. in a good state of repair
2. safe and secure
3. adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated
4. contain up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms
5. well managed (for rented housing)
6. located in attractive and safe environments
7. as far as possible suit the specific requirements of the household (e.g. specific disabilities)”

Whilst the Welsh Housing Quality Standard does not apply to private sector properties, the Housing Renewal Service needs to take account of the WHQS, especially when undertaking work in areas that are likely to be of mixed tenure. In such situations, close partnership working with the relevant Registered Social Landlords is required to ensure a co-ordinated approach exists across tenures.

2.2 Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP)

An important part of the WHQS is to make properties more energy efficient and reduce energy consumption. Under WHQS, a properties energy rating needs to be assessed using the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP). SAP is the recommended system for measuring the energy rating of residential dwellings and reflects the annual energy costs per unit of space, as well as the expected costs of water heating. SAP ratings range from 1 (least efficient) to 120 (most efficient) and the WHQS requirement is that all social housing properties must achieve a minimum rating of 65 out of 100. Whilst private sector properties are not bound by the conditions of the WHQS, there is increasing pressure on Local Authorities and Energy companies to improve energy efficiency in the home. SAP ratings are included in both the NRA Assessments and the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey.

2.3 Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty

The National Housing Strategy for Wales, ‘Improving Lives and Communities’, emphasizes the vital role that housing plays in making Wales a more sustainable place to live. The strategy identifies the direct impact that running a home can have on people’s incomes and their health and well being. Low incomes, rising fuel prices and poor energy efficiency in homes, has led to a significant growth in the number of people experiencing fuel poverty. The Welsh Assembly Government’s Fuel Strategy 2010 recognises that fuel poverty has a major impact on the health, social and economic well-being of householders. It also highlighted it can increase the demands on resources of public sector services, such as the NHS, by increasing the need of householders to access services.

Fuel poverty is defined as having to spend more than 10 per cent of income (including housing benefit) on all household fuel use in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime. In circumstances where expenditure on all household fuel exceeds 20 per cent of income, households are defined as being in severe fuel poverty. The Welsh Assembly Government’s ‘A Fuel Poverty Commitment for Wales’ sets out targets in 2003 for eradicating fuel poverty in Wales and a new Fuel poverty scheme, **NEST**, has been established between the Welsh Assembly Government, British Gas and the Energy Saving Trust to offer an enhanced range of advice and support. .

In addition to the NEST scheme, energy companies are also required to achieve targets for improvements to household energy efficiency. This is being carried out through subsidizing energy efficiency schemes such as cavity wall and loft insulation. The Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) has now been replaced by the Carbon Emissions Reduction

Target (CERT). Energy suppliers are required to achieve set targets for promoting reductions in carbon emissions in domestic households. The aim of CERT is to double the level of activity seen under the EEC and maintain a focus on vulnerable customers. Local Authorities also have a duty to contribute to the improvement of energy efficiency under the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) 1995, which placed a duty upon them to develop a strategy for improving energy efficiency in all housing tenures.

The Welsh Assembly Government has committed itself to work with Local Authorities to develop Community Energy Saving Programmes (CESP) in Wales and work in close co-operation to improve standards within the private sector, in particular Renewal Areas, which can lead to significant improvements to the energy efficiency of homes often as part of a wider improvement programme.

Torfaen County Borough Council will seek to address energy efficiency, by including measures such as loft insulation, hot water tank lagging and double glazing in its specification of grant works, which will help to reduce the potential for fuel poverty. The Council will also work with partners such as Torfaen Care and Repair and the South East Wales Energy Efficiency Centre to promote energy efficiency in Torfaen and to advise residents on the availability of assistance.

2.4 Housing Health and Safety Rating System

The Housing Act 2004 introduced a new risk based system for assessing the suitability of housing, called the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) which came into effect in 2006. HHSRS (which replaced the Fitness Standard of the Housing Act 1985) evaluates potential risks which may result from defects identified in a property.

In certain situations, when property conditions are particularly acute, enforcement action may be required. To identify the potential risk, a property is rated against the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

The HHSRS is based upon a risk assessment against 29 defined hazards that may be found in a property, and enables Local Authorities to identify where enforcement action is required. Housing health and safety practitioners assess the likelihood of a hazard causing harm over a 12 month period and the health outcomes, should such an incident take place. Particular regard must be given as to the effects such an incident would have on vulnerable groups. The assessment leads to a score for a particular hazard and the score is then put into a series of bands ranging from A-J. Bands A-C are termed Category 1 hazards whilst bands D-J are termed Category 2 hazards. A Local Authority is under a duty to deal with any Category 1 hazard whilst it also has a power to deal with Category 2 hazards.

Whilst largely applicable to occupied houses to protect the health and safety of residents, the HHSRS allows vacant properties to be assessed and places a duty on Local Authorities to take action where Category 1 hazards exist. The scores from different hazards are not intended to be combined, but the presence of a number of individual hazards may influence a decision to take action. The 29 hazards can be categorized into 4 main groups:

Physiological (e.g. damp & mould growth, excess cold, asbestos etc)

Psychological (crowding and space, entry by intruders, lighting, noise)

Protection against infection (domestic hygiene, food safety, water supply)

Protection against accident (e.g. falls on the level, electrical hazards, fire, collision)

Depending on the score, a Local Authority will need to decide whether it has a duty or discretion to act and what is the most appropriate means for dealing with the hazard. Different enforcement options are available:

- Serve an improvement order, requiring remedial works;
- Make a prohibition order, which closes the whole or part of a dwelling or restricts the number of permitted occupants;
- Suspend these types of notice
- Take emergency action;
- Serve a hazard awareness notice;
- Make a demolition order;
- Declare a clearance area

In addition, powers to act in default and prosecute lack of compliance are available.

A Local Authority cannot simultaneously take more than one of these actions, but it can take a different course of action or the same course again, if the action already taken has not proved satisfactory. Emergency measures are the exception (Emergency remedial action followed by an improvement notice or a prohibition order, is a single course of action).

The new hazard based rating system introduces a more flexible enforcement framework which allows Local Authorities to take action against a much broader range of housing conditions.

2.5 Enforcement

If the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) finds significant risks at a property, enforcement action will need to be considered. Enforcement can take many

different forms, depending on the severity of the situation and any previous action taken. Enforcement can cover:

- Private dwellings,
- Registered Social Landlord dwellings,
- Empty properties,
- Houses in Multiple Occupation

Enforcement action against owners in the private sector is taken by the Public Health Team, and can be broadly divided into Formal and Informal action. Should people not comply with legislative requirements, the following sanctions are available:

- Work in default
- Formal caution
- Prosecution

By exercising its power of delegation, the Council has authorized the Public Health Team to carry out enforcement action and to progress the imposition of sanctions on its behalf. The procedures outlined below are set out in detail in the Department for the Environment General Enforcement Policy.

Informal Action

This will include verbal advice given by Officers and advisory letters. It should be noted that it is not always possible to adopt an informal approach, especially when legislation requires formal action to be taken straight away. An example of this is the service of a Notice under Section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 where there is a statutory nuisance.

Formal Action

Formal action involves the serving of Notices. Most Notices served by the Public Health Team require the recipient of the Notice to commence and complete specified works within specified time limits. All Notices have notes with them that explain the effect of the Notice and the recipient's right of appeal. Officers will always be willing to discuss the works specified in the Notice and the reason for the service of the Notice.

Sanctions

If the recipient of a Notice does not comply with the Notice, the Council has various sanctions it can impose. Depending on the type of Notice that is served, non-compliance can be:-

- Not doing any work at all
- Not starting the work by the time specified within the Notice
- Starting the work but then not making reasonable progress, or
- Starting the work and then not finishing it

Work in Default

Work in default is a power given to the Council, to ensure that work is carried out to a property. If the recipient of the Notice does not do the work required by the Notice, the Council is able to employ a contractor to enter the property and carry out the work itself. If the Council has to do this, it will charge the appropriate person for the cost of the works together with the costs involved in arranging for the work to be done.

It should be noted that carrying out work in default does not exclude the Council from either issuing a formal caution or prosecuting the offender. The Council is entitled to ensure that the work is carried out and Officers will then consider if it is appropriate to take further action.

There are various methods, by which the Council can recover the costs incurred in carrying out work in default, dependent on the type of Notice that has been served.

Sundry Debtor Method

Using this method, the Council will send the appropriate person an invoice requesting payment. If this is not paid within 14 days, a reminder invoice is sent requesting payment within 7 days. If the invoice is not paid, details are passed to the Credit Protection Agency (CPA) to recover the outstanding balance. Depending on the size of the debt, action will be taken in the County Court or written off if it is not economical to recover the debt.

Charge on the Property

Whenever legislation allows, a charge will be put on the property, which means that when the property is sold, the Council will expect to be paid the amount of the debt, plus interest. This is usually a very slow method of recovering money. The Council has 6 years from the date the work was carried out in default to recover the debt.

Sequestering Rents

The Council is entitled to serve a Notice on the appropriate person to reclaim the costs of the work in default. If this Notice is not complied with (i.e. the costs are not paid) the Council can then serve a Notice on the tenant requiring him to pay the rent to the Council until such time as the costs are recovered.

Forcing Sale of the Property

The ultimate method by which the Council can reclaim its costs is to force the sale of the property. The proceeds of the sale will be given to the owner, less the amount owed for the work in default and less the amount incurred by the Council in selling the property.

Formal Caution

An alternative to prosecuting a person is the issuing of a formal caution. A formal caution is where an offender is given written details of the offence and he/she signs to say that he/she admits the offence. It is not a form of sentence.

A record of the caution is kept at the Council for a period of 3 years and it may subsequently influence a decision to instigate proceedings should the offender break the law in the future. It may also be cited if the Council takes legal action for a subsequent offence.

Prosecution

Non-compliance with any of the Notices referred to in Appendix A of this policy document is generally a criminal offence. The Council is the prosecuting authority for such offences and as they are criminal in nature, proceedings are taken in the Magistrates Court.

Shared Enforcement Responsibility

In circumstances where enforcement responsibility is shared between enforcement agencies, the Public Health Team will have regard to procedures agreed with other enforcement agencies, particularly where memoranda of understanding exists.

In some cases, enforcement powers will rest with another agency (for example, the Health and Safety Executive has enforcement of gas safety in domestic property). In these situations, the Public Health Team will act to ensure that the case is transferred to the enforcing agency promptly and in accordance with any agreed procedures.

Taking Action and Imposing Sanctions

In deciding when to take action and when to impose sanctions, Officers of the Public Health Team will have regard to the guidelines in the sections below.

The decision to take informal or formal action will be made by the individual Officer, in consultation with the Head of Environmental Health.

The decision to execute work in default will be made by the individual Officer in consultation with the Head of Environmental Health.

In deciding whether to issue a formal caution or proceed with a prosecution, the final decision will be made by the Head of Environmental Protection in consultation with the Council's Legal Services Department.

The Public Health Team must also take into account those situations where consultation with other bodies is required.

When we will take Enforcement Action

As previously mentioned in this document, there are occasions when the Public Health Team must take formal action because the legislation requires it. In particular, the service of a Notice under section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

On other occasions, Officers are required to take informal action.

In other situations there is a presumption that Notices will be served if the criteria set down in the legislation are met. However, this presumption can be rebutted depending on the circumstances of the case. As cases vary so much, it is difficult to be prescriptive about when Officers will not serve Notices. Each case is looked at individually and the following factors taken into account:

- The effects of the situation on the health and safety of those affected;
- The intentions of both the landlord and tenant in respect of letting the property;
- Any previous complaints about the owner of the property or his agent;
- The future life of the property; and
- The willingness of the owner to put right any problems without the need for formal enforcement action.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Where Officers are required to serve certain formal Notices under the Housing Act 2004, the Council will usually charge the recipient of the Notice in order to recover its reasonable administrative expenses incurred in serving the Notice.

In some cases, the Council is required to consult with other bodies when taking enforcement action. An example of this is where we take action under Section 10 of the Housing Act 2004 to improve fire safety in a house in multiple occupation. We are required by law to consult with the Fire Authority.

When We Will Impose Sanctions

In all cases where an offence is committed, consideration will be given by Officers as to whether a sanction should be imposed, and if so, which one. In some cases it may be appropriate to impose two sanctions for example, carrying out work in default and also prosecuting the offender.

Work in Default

In determining if work in default is appropriate, Officers will consider the following:-

- The effects of not carrying out the work on the health and safety of the occupant of the property concerned, or on a neighbouring property;
- The wishes of the tenant where the Notice has been served in respect of a rented property; or
- The reason for the work not being carried out in the first place.

Again this is not an exhaustive list and other factors may be taken into account.

Caution or Prosecution

The decision to either offer a formal caution or take a prosecution is one that is not taken lightly. Officers recognize that their decision is significant and could have far reaching consequences upon the alleged offender and others.

Each case that an Officer deals with is unique and must be considered on its own facts. However, there are general principles that apply to the way in which Officers decide whether a sanction should be applied and if so, which one. The decision to offer a formal caution or to take a prosecution will be made by Officers of the Public Health Team, in consultation with the Council's Legal Services Department.

In deciding whether to proceed with a caution or a prosecution, the Public Health Team's enforcement policy reflects guidance laid down in the CPS (Crown Prosecution Service) Code for Crown Prosecutors, Home Office Circulars on Cautioning Adult Offenders and advice from LACORS. There are two overarching tests within the CPS Code that must be used when determining whether to prosecute. These are the evidential test and the public interest test.

The Evidential Test

Officer must be satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction. This is an objective test and means that a court is more likely than not to convict the offender of the charge alleged.

In deciding whether there is a realistic prospect of conviction, consideration is given to matters such as:-

- Is the evidence admissible in court? There are certain legal rules that might mean that evidence that seems relevant might not be used at a trial.
- Is the evidence reliable? Officers have to consider whether there is evidence that may detract or support any admission by the offender. Equally, Officers have to consider the witnesses they may use and whether there are concerns about their accuracy or credibility.

The Public Interest Test

A prosecution will usually take place unless the officer is sure that there are public interest factors tending against prosecution which outweigh those tending in favour or unless the officer is satisfied that the public interest may be properly served in the first instance by offering the offender the opportunity to have the matter dealt with by an out of court disposal.

The following are examples of factors taken into account when determining public interest but the list is not exhaustive:-

- The seriousness of the offence. In housing terms this will mean Officers looking at the effects of not complying with the Notice for example.
- Whether there was violence used in the commission of the offence
- The vulnerability of the victim of the offence. Again, this is a particularly important consideration when harassment or unlawful eviction has also occurred. Although offences of this type are not acceptable regardless of the victim, it is

considered even less acceptable if the victims are elderly, suffering ill health or disability or have young children

- Whether the offence was motivated by discrimination. Consideration as to the nature of the sanction imposed will be determined by whether the offender was motivated by any form of discrimination against the victim's ethnic or national origin, sex, religious beliefs, political views or sexual orientation.
- The history of the offender. In particular, Officers will have regard to whether Notices have been served in the past, the response to those Notices and any previous housing based convictions.
- The likely penalty. Consideration will be given to whether the offence is such that it would only attract a nominal penalty from the Courts.
- Reason for the offence occurring. Although there may be, on the face of it, a breach of law, there may be a statutory defence available in housing offences. For example, failure to comply with a Section 189 Housing Act Notice is only an offence if the person intentionally failed to comply with it. Other factors may be considered though. For example, if the offence results from genuine mistake or misunderstanding these may be factors against prosecution but this would be balanced against the seriousness of the offence.
- The suspect's previous convictions or the previous out of court disposals which he or she has received that are relevant to the present offence.
- A prosecution would have a significant positive impact on maintaining community confidence.
- The suspect was a ringleader or an organizer of the offence.
- The suspect was in a position of authority or trust and he or she took advantage of this.

In addition to the two tests, there are certain conditions that must exist before a caution can be administered, namely:-

- There must be evidence of the offender's guilt sufficient to give a realistic prospect of conviction;
- The offender must admit the offence;
- The offender must understand the significance of the caution and give his informed consent to accepting the caution.

If any of the above criteria are not met, the Council will not consider the issuing of a formal caution. Above all, a caution will not be used as a substitute for a prosecution that would otherwise be unsustainable.

2.6 Empty Properties

The monitoring and management of Empty Properties in Torfaen is co-ordinated by the Housing and Public Health Teams. Long term empty properties are categorized and then prioritized, based on the length of time they have been empty and the long term problems that are being caused as a result. When enforcement action is required, this is dealt with by the Public Health Team, which has a range of enforcement options available.

Nuisance arising from premises

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 enables Environmental Health Officers to serve abatement notices for statutory nuisances caused by a property's structure or, as the result of any land associated with the property. Notices are served on the owner of the property and can require certain works to be undertaken within a specified timescale. If the owner fails to comply with the requirements of the notices (subject to appeal), the Council may pursue the matter through the Magistrates' Court, and/or carry out works in default.

Rodents

Under Section 4 of the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, the Public Health Team has the power to serve notices on the owner or occupier to ensure the premises are free from rodents. The notice can specify treatments to control the pests, as well as requiring structural repairs to be carried out to secure the property against further access by rodents. If the notice is not complied with, the Council may carry out the work in default and recover any expenses by placing a charge on the property.

Dangerous, insecure, dilapidated or statutory nuisance property

Several sections of the Building Act 1984 can be used to secure premises against unauthorised entry and are appropriate for use in the case of empty properties.

Section 76

Under this section, a notice can be served when the premises are in such a state as to be a nuisance or prejudicial to health. Notices served under this section of the Building Act state that the Council intend to carry out specified work to remedy the situation. Seven days are provided for the owner to make an appeal and within nine days of serving the notice, the Council can commence work in default and recover reasonable costs from the owner. This section should only be used if unreasonable delay in remedying the defective state would be occasioned by following the procedure prescribed by section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Abatement Notice).

Sections 77 & 78

If an empty property is in so severe a condition as to be considered dangerous, then notices can be served under section 77 or 78 of the Building Act 1985. Notices served

under section 77 require the owner of the property to carry out any work necessary to remove the danger or to demolish the structure. Any expenses incurred by the Council can be recovered from the owner of the premises via the Magistrates' Court. Section 78 is only used in emergency situations and it is recommended that the Council seek to notify the owner of their intended action prior to undertaking the emergency measures.

Section 79

This allows notices to be served for ruinous and dilapidated buildings, where conditions are seriously detrimental to the neighbourhood. These powers rest with the Environmental Health Officer.

To ensure that a property is secure against unauthorized entry, the Council can undertake works on an unoccupied property under Section 29 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. Normally a period of 48 hours notice of the Council's intention to carry out works would be given to the owner. If the owner is absent or the works are needed urgently, the notice period can be waived. Reasonable costs incurred by the Council may be recovered from the owner of the property via the County Court. These powers rest with the Environmental Health Officer.

Unsightly property

Where the land of a property is in such a poor condition that it is having an adverse effect on the neighbourhood, the local planning authority may serve on the owner or occupier of the land, a notice under section 215 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990. Although this option does not culminate in a final use for the property, it is a tool that will be considered as an interim measure to make the situation more tolerable for neighbouring property owners. This power rests with Planners and Environmental Health Officers.

Property requiring demolition

In acute circumstances, Demolition Orders remain available to Local Authorities under Part 9 of the Housing Act 1985 as amended. They are a possible response to a category 1 hazard where this is the appropriate course of action. The location of adjacent buildings is a key factor in determining the viability of this option and the process involves undertaking a neighbourhood renewal assessment.

Property being used for substance misuse

If an empty property is being used for substance misuse, the Council can take action under the 2002 Police Reform Act.

Derelict or abandoned empty property

Compulsory Purchase

Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) can be made under Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985. Section 17 empowers local housing authorities to compulsorily purchase a house (or houses), for the provision of housing accommodation or to make improvement to

existing housing, which includes acquiring empty houses. In practice the power involves the use of procedures set out in the Acquisition of Land Act 1981. The power to sanction a CPO rests with the Director of Service and is subject to confirmation by the National Assembly for Wales.

Enforced Sale

The Enforced Sale Procedure (ESP) can be used to bring about the sale of a privately owned property. It is used when the present owner is either unwilling or unable to deal with the house and its associated problems. To use an ESP, there must be a financial charge registered against the property in the Local Land Charges Register. This then gives a Local Authority all the powers and remedies available to a mortgagee under the Law of Property Act 1925, including a power of sale. An Order of the Court is not necessary as the legislation itself provides that power.

The Council can enforce the sale of an empty property, where it has secured a debt in excess of £500 against the property. The Council's Housing, Planning, Community Safety, Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided that a trigger for the consideration of enforced sale would be if visits occurred over the year and/or works in default had been carried out in excess of £3,000. Debts are normally the result of enforcement action to remove nuisances associated with empty properties, but information regarding all debts owed to the Council is considered. The property can then be sold at auction or tenders invited by a deadline date.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)

The Housing Act 2004 provides for Local Authorities to take over and manage an unoccupied dwelling from the owner, where the owner has turned down offers to bring the property back into use and can offer no good reason why the property should remain empty. These orders enable the Council to gradually increase the pressure on the owner without taking a heavy-handed approach from the outset. In many cases the Councils have not had to apply for the full order, since owners have tended to take their own action once aware of the implications. If the Council has to use the full EDMO powers, it can lease the home to meet housing need without the owner's permission.

2.7 Houses in Multiple Occupation

A House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) is a property that is occupied by more than one household with shared amenities. HMOs often represent the worse end of the private rented sector and tend to have poorer conditions than other privately rented properties. They are often the only housing option available for many of the most vulnerable people in society and for this reason, the government recognizes that it is vital that HMOs are properly regulated to ensure that tenants do not suffer unacceptable housing conditions

Under the Housing Act 2004 there are 3 types of licensing. A duty is placed on Local Authorities to implement a mandatory licensing scheme for certain categories of HMO (those with the highest risk) and a power to implement additional licensing schemes for other HMOs and rented accommodation.

Mandatory licensing

This is required for properties with the highest risks. An indication of the highest risk properties are those that are three or more storey's high, have 5 or more occupants comprising two or more households, who share amenities.

Additional licensing

Smaller HMOs that would not be subject to mandatory licensing could still be covered by the additional licensing arrangements. If considered appropriate, this discretionary power can be applied to HMOs which are badly managed and giving rise to particular problems.

Selective licensing

Properties that are not subject to HMO licensing could be covered under a selective licensing scheme. This licensing would cover all forms of private rented housing, including HMOs. This could be applied to particular areas or properties where there were concerns.

Licensing is intended to make sure that:

- Landlords of HMOs are fit and proper people, or employ managers who are
- Each HMO is suitable for occupation by the number of people allowed under the licence
- The standard of management of the HMO is adequate
- High risk HMOs can be identified and targeted for improvement
- Vulnerable tenants can be protected
- HMOs are not overcrowded
- Councils can identify and support landlords, especially with regeneration and tackling antisocial behaviour

Landlords need to comply with any licensing regime that is in place and where there is refusal to meet these criteria, authorities can intervene and manage the property.

Part 3: Financial Assistance, Products and Services

3.1 Housing Renewal Grants and Products

This section covers the various grants, products and services that may be available for the improvement of private sector housing. It is important to note that the grants and products have different eligibility criteria and conditions, and more details are provided further on. They are also subject to the availability of funding (please see section 1.6 on Resources). Specifically linked to private sector housing renewal and managed through the Housing Renewal Service are the following:

- Group Repair Schemes
- Environmental Schemes
- Torfaen Renovation Grant (TRG)
- Enveloping Schemes
- Minor Repair Assistance (MRA)
- Property Improvement Loan
- Housing Renewal Agency Service

Housing renewal works can be undertaken in three broad categories: residential; environmental; and commercial/residential. (These are also outlined in section 1.6).

For more in depth information on Housing Renewal grants and products please contact the Housing Renewal team. Contact details can be found on page 4 of this document.

There are also other forms of financial assistance towards the improvement and adaptation of private sector properties:

- Disabled Facility Grant (DFG)
- Torfaen Care and Repair
- NEST – Welsh Assembly Government’s Fuel Poverty Scheme

These are covered later in this section and contact details are provided for signposting purposes.

Group Repair Schemes

The Council has successfully undertaken Group Repair Schemes for a number of years. Undertaking group repairs on mainly older, terraced housing stock has been an

important component of the area based regeneration initiatives of the Council. The object of Group Repair Schemes has been to improve the external fabric, to enhance an area, maintain homes and ensure that they are structurally stable. This approach has advantages in terms of scale, bringing about a greater impact to an area and encouraging owners to carry out further investment in their properties. Properties must have a residential element to be eligible for the Group Repair Scheme. It would be at the discretion of the Council whether to include properties that do not have a residential element. It is also at the Council's discretion where to target Group Repair Schemes improvements and there is no waiting list for applicants.

Group Repair Scheme grants require owners to make a contribution of 25%, if the owner chooses to be financially means tested, the contribution they make may be reduced. Applications are accepted from owner occupiers, private landlords and for long term empty properties. The maximum grant available under the Group Repair Scheme is currently £25,000 (although this may be exceeded in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Local Authority where severe housing health and safety hazards and risks (section 2.4). are evident. The size, condition, location, construction type and fabric of properties may also be taken into account). This limit will be reviewed annually. In the event of a Torfaen Renovation Grant being undertaken in conjunction with a Group Repair Scheme grant at a property, the total grant allowance for the property is combined at £25,000, although the exceptions may still apply.

Once a grant has been approved by the Council a land charge is registered on the property with the Land Registry. The land charge ensures that if the owner moves or gives up ownership of the property within 5 years after which the works have been completed all the grant monies can be recovered. After 5 years the registered charge will no longer be recoverable. Grant recipients are required to inform the Local Authority Housing Renewal Team if they move or give up ownership of the property within the land charge period. *Please note there are exceptions to recovering the grant within the 5 year period, if the grant claimant moves into sheltered, residential/nursing care or moves to live with a relative to act as a carer. In these circumstances supporting evidence would be required.*

Environmental Schemes

Environmental Schemes are undertaken to improve the external features of an area or community. This may include external boundaries, walls, paths, community buildings, car parks, play equipment and other types of street furniture. The schemes are not linked specifically to individual properties, but to the general environmental improvement of an area. It is at the Council's discretion where to target Environmental Scheme improvements and there is no waiting list for applicants.

There is no specified limit for the amount of grant available, and no contributions are required from home owners or land owners. No land charge registration applies.

Torfaen Renovation Grants (TRG)

Torfaen Renovation Grants are designed to assist owner occupiers, private landlords and for long term empty properties where the property is in serious disrepair. The idea behind Torfaen Renovation Grants is to tackle the individual private housing properties that are in the worst state of disrepair. The grants are means tested and subject to a waiting list priority assessment system that includes assessing the presence of severe Housing Health and Safety Rating System hazards and risks (section 2.4). When funding becomes available property owners at the top of the pointed waiting list are approached first.

To apply for a Torfaen Renovation Grant the property must be at least 20 years old and in ownership by the applicant for at least 3 years. However, for properties within the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas the 3 year rule does not apply. For owner occupiers and long term empty properties, the grants are financially means tested and the owner may be required to make a contribution of up to 100% towards the cost of the works. For private landlords there is no financial means test and 50% towards the cost of works is required. The maximum Torfaen Renovation Grant limit is currently £25,000 (although this may be exceeded in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Local Authority where severe housing health and safety hazards and risks (section 2.4). are evident. The size, condition, location, construction type and fabric of properties may also be taken into account). The limit will be reviewed annually. One Torfaen Renovation Grant will be allowed per applicant, subject to exceptions and provisions at the discretion of the Council. In the event of a Group Repair Scheme grant being undertaken in conjunction with a Torfaen Renovation Grant at a property, the total grant allowance for the property is combined at £25,000, although the exceptions may still apply.

Once a grant has been approved by the Council a land charge is registered on the property with the Land Registry. The land charge ensures that if the owner moves or gives up ownership of the property within 5 years after which the works have been completed all the grant monies can be recovered. After 5 years the registered charge will no longer be recoverable. Grant recipients are required to inform the Local Authority Housing Renewal Team if they move from, rent out, or give up ownership of the property within the land charge period. *Please note there are exceptions to recovering the grant within the 5 year period, if the grant claimant moves into sheltered, residential/nursing care or moves to live with a relative to act as a carer. In these circumstances supporting evidence would be required.*

Enveloping Schemes

Despite the success of the Group Repair Scheme, there are small pockets of properties, where the conventional group repair approach will not succeed. Whilst these are fairly few in number, the extent of the renovation required and the financial limitations of the owners would make a Group Repair Scheme unsuccessful. In these circumstances, a more intensive whole area approach is needed. Enveloping Grants provide real scope for improving the housing and general amenities, because like Group Repair Schemes, they tackle external works and structural elements, but properties are designated with a view

to funding 100% of the enveloping works. It is at the Council's discretion where to target Enveloping Schemes improvements and there is no waiting list for applicants.

Enveloping grants are not financially means tested and home owners are not required to make a contribution towards the cost of the works. Applications are accepted from private home owners. The maximum grant available under the Enveloping Scheme is currently £25,000 (although this may be exceeded in exceptional circumstances upon the discretion of the Local Authority where there are severe hazards and risks. (Please see section 2.4 on the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System). The size, condition, location, construction type and fabric of properties may also be taken into account). The limit will be reviewed annually.

Once a grant has been approved by the Council a land charge is registered on the property with the Land Registry. The land charge ensures that if the owner moves or gives up ownership of the property within 7 years after which the works have been completed all the grant monies can be recovered. After 7 years the registered charge will no longer be recoverable. Grant recipients are required to inform the Local Authority Housing Renewal Team if they move or give up ownership of the property within the land charge period. *Please note there are exceptions to recovering the grant within the 7 year period, if the grant claimant moves into sheltered, residential/nursing care or moves to live with a relative to act as a carer. In these circumstances supporting evidence would be required.*

Minor Repair Assistance (MRA)

Tackling fuel poverty and the energy inefficiency of private sector properties is mainstream throughout the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy. Minor Repair Assistance enables the Council to provide small grants to owner occupiers to improve the energy efficiency of their properties and to also support households out of fuel poverty. Typical works covered by this grant include loft insulation, renewing boilers, upgrading central heating and renewing/inputting double glazing. The grants are means tested and subject to a waiting list priority assessment system. When funding becomes available owner occupiers at the top of the pointed waiting list are approached first.

The maximum grant available is £5000 and only one grant is available within a 5 year period. To apply for a Minor Repair Allowance the owner occupier must undergo a financial means test. Grants are available to owner occupiers whose means test contribution is less than £1000 and who do not qualify for any grant through the NEST fuel poverty scheme. No land charge registration applies.

Property Improvement Loan

The Welsh Government has identified the need to develop a private sector housing loan scheme, to assist people in financing renovation works and to help reduce grant dependency. A National Loans scheme is currently under development.

Torfaen identifies the need in the borough to support homeowners to undertake improvements and repairs to their properties. To support an increased number of Homeowners to improve the standards of their properties, a Property Improvement Loan scheme has been made available from April 2014.

The Property Improvement Loan (PIL) is offered on an interest free, repayment basis with a maximum loan available of £10,000. The PIL product is funded through Specific Capital Grant (SCG) and Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). The maximum period over which repayments can be made is over either a 5 or 7 year period.

Once repayments are made the money will be recycled to be used again on further properties and in other areas. This helps increase the availability of valuable home improvement assistance to wider numbers of people in the community.

As security there a legal charge is registered against the property for the amount of loan that is being borrowed, which will be repaid over an agreed period of time.

The Property Improvement Loan may not be suitable to all applicants and certain eligibility criteria apply. The PIL will be made available to targeted eligible home owners who need to make improvements or repairs to their properties, taking into account applicants' financial and affordability circumstances, (applicants with savings of over £16,000 will not be considered). The availability of other grant funding or subsidy will also be of consideration.

To ensure that the Housing Renewal Team is targeting those dwellings that are in the most urgent need of renovation, properties that are at the top of the Housing Renewal Torfaen Renovation Grant priority points waiting list will be approached first in descending order of priority subject to available funds. (Please note SCG is applicable to Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and restrictions apply. Please refer to Part 1.5 and 1.6).

For Disabled Facilities Grant recipients, the Property Improvement Loan will only be offered to those eligible applicants where the cost of mandatory works are in excess of the £36,000 statutory maximum limit. Therefore the PIL may fund works towards the improvement of properties that are associated with DFG works over the £36,000.

Torfaen County Borough Council will determine what works can be included within the PIL scheme, and in what circumstances they will be provided. Loan applicants will be assisted through the process by the Council as the PIL administrator.

The maximum amount of loan that can be offered to an owner occupier applicant is £10,000. The maximum amount can only be loaned if there is sufficient equity in the property. The Loan to Value ratio must be no more than 80%. Repayments will be collected by direct debit on a monthly basis.

A land charge is also registered on the property with the Land Registry. The land charge ensures that when the property is sold, the loan is repaid in full.

Exceptions to Policy

The Council's policies are specific about the circumstances in which an application will be considered, how much grant/loan aid it will provide and the conditions that will be applicable to the provision of grant aid. However each application will be considered on its individual merits.

Therefore subject to available funding, where there are exceptional circumstances and where the applicant is able to demonstrate exceptional hardship or provide a very strong justification on the basis of need, the Council is able to give consideration to those circumstances.

Housing Renewal Agency Service

The Council considers that work which is eligible and in receipt of Housing Renewal financial assistance (grants and Property Improvement Loan) should be designed and supervised by surveyors, architects or other appropriate professionals. The Housing Renewal Team delivers a professional Housing Renewal Agency Service and are available to oversee Housing Renewal works providing the project management, surveying and clerk of works functions. The service also covers the commissioning of suitable contractors and other required professionals and liaison with the relevant Council sections to obtain the necessary statutory consents for Planning and Building Control.

The Housing Renewal Agency Service is charged at fees equal to 15% of the total cost of works. This is subject to annual review.

3.2 Other Grants and Services

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

A Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is a means-tested grant that can help towards the cost of adapting a property, thereby enabling the occupier to continue living there. A DFG is paid when the Council considers that changes are necessary to meet a persons needs, and the work is reasonable and practical. Adaptations might include installing a stair lift and/or ramps, improving access to rooms, adding a downstairs bathing facility or a walk-in shower.

A DFG may cover the cost of a major adaptation in part or whole up to the value of £36,000. Applicants may be eligible for a grant if they have a permanent and substantial physical disability. There is no means testing if the adaptation is for a disabled child.

A full assessment of an applicant's needs and their home is carried out, to determine eligibility and what work needs to be done. Occupational therapists will assess the need for adaptations across all tenures, however for tenants, the Council's recommendations will be sent to the landlord for a decision on whether to provide the adaptation. Disabled Facilities Grants are managed by the Disabled People's Service within the Council.

The property improvement loan product will be available to top up DFG funding where works are over the £36,000 limit.

They can be contacted on:

socialcarecalltorfaen@torfaen.gov.uk

Disabled People's Service
County Hall
Cwmbran
Torfaen NP44 2WN
01633 762200

Torfaen Care and Repair

Torfaen Council works with partner organisations to provide help for older and disabled people. Torfaen Care and Repair, currently run by Melin Homes, is a free, comprehensive, home improvement and advisory service that aims to look after vulnerable residents and ensure that their homes are safe, secure and appropriate for their needs. Torfaen Care and Repair helps home owners and private tenants who are old or disabled, to stay in their home for longer, with increased comfort, warmth and security. This is achieved by arranging for repairs or adaptations to be carried to the property, or advising the resident on suitable works. Care & Repair works in conjunction with a number of agencies; it can make referrals on resident's behalf and can sometimes access funding from different sources towards the cost of repairs or adaptations.

Torfaen Care and Repair is hosted by Melin Homes. They can be contacted on:

info@crtorfaen.co.uk
Care and Repair Torfaen
Ty Clarence
Clarence Street
Pontypool
Torfaen NP4 6LG
01495 768870

NEST - Welsh Assembly Government's New Fuel Poverty Scheme

One of the major issues affecting private sector housing stock is fuel poverty and a lack of energy efficiency. To combat this problem, the Welsh Assembly Government invited bids from companies to head up a new fuel poverty scheme starting in April 2012.

The tender was won by British Gas who are working with the Welsh Assembly Government and the Energy Saving Trust, to provide advice and practical measures to those who most need it.

As well as support in accessing energy efficiency improvements, NEST also provides callers with guidance on benefit entitlement, energy tariffs and money management, through a range of expert partners. The advantage of NEST is that it provides one central co-ordination point that offers tailored advice and support to help people improve the energy efficiency of their homes and reduce their energy bills.

A British Gas team of experts from across Wales will visit eligible properties to conduct a Whole House Assessment before suggesting, agreeing or installing a range of measures suitable for that home and its occupants. To be considered for Nest energy improvement work you must be receiving a means tested benefit, your property must have an energy efficiency rating of F or G and be privately owned or privately rented.

The NEST scheme can be contacted on 0800 512 012 or by visiting their website at www.nestwales.org.uk

Part 4: Monitoring the Policy & Strategy

4.1 Performance Measuring

To guarantee the best use of resources it is important to monitor the works undertaken by the Housing Renewal Service and the progress of the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy. Some performance monitoring is undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government through periodic returns required from the Local Authority Housing Renewal Team.

These returns provide details of the number of properties in a Neighbourhood Renewal Area that have been improved in a year and how grant money has been allocated (the amount of grant or loan given to owners or landlords). Details also include funding from other sources that have contributed to Housing Renewal work (General Capital Fund, owner contributions, third party assistance).

Expenditure data is collected to demonstrate what the Local Authority is spending, which in turn will influence the amount of grant we receive from the Welsh Assembly Government in the future. This data also helps to monitor the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and influences the development of future housing renewal policy.

4.2 Customer Satisfaction

The effectiveness of the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy will be monitored against the performance of the Housing Renewal Team, the use of available resources, and by evaluating customer satisfaction.

It is also essential to monitor the delivery of the Housing Renewal Service by consulting with the customers who receive the service. The Housing Renewal Team provides customer satisfaction questionnaires to all grant recipients upon completion of works and welcome feedback upon both the Local Authority service and that provided by the building contractors. Completed customer satisfaction questionnaires are collated and assessed to identify areas for improvement and findings contribute to the Housing Renewal quality assurance framework.

With the recent declaration of new Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in Torfaen, further consultation is scheduled to take place with residents in NRAs to measure the impact of housing renewal upon quality of life, socio-economic status, health and well-being. This will assist in helping the Council to evaluate the impact of housing renewal on communities and neighbourhoods as well as on individual households.

4.3 How to Complain

Complaints Procedure

The Council endeavours to provide a first class service and meet the needs of the public, but there may be circumstances when individuals feel aggrieved and sometimes we may not get it right. It is important that you complain to us if you feel we have let you down in any way. Your complaint will help us to:

- Put things right for you
- Make sure we don't make the mistake again
- Improve our services for everyone

If you have a complaint about the Housing Renewal Policy & Strategy or any aspect of the Housing Renewal Service, these should be addressed to the Housing Renewal Team using the following contact details.

Tel: 01495 742638
Email: housingrenewalteam@torfaen.gov.uk
Address: Torfaen County Borough Council
Housing Renewal Team
Civic Centre
Pontypool
Torfaen NP4 6YB