

HSVP 01

Cymorth tai i bobl sy'n agored i niwed

Housing support for vulnerable people

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Castell-nedd Port Talbot

Response from: Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Committee Inquiry – Housing Support for Vulnerable People

1. How effectively the Welsh Government is planning for the future of HSG in light of rapid rehousing transition and the forthcoming Homelessness Bill.

- 1.1. The Welsh Government (WG) needs to consider the financial impact of the White Paper on the Housing Support Grant (HSG) budget. There are additional demands on local authorities, necessitating increased funding to effectively discharge duties and achieve desired outcomes.
- 1.2. The HSG guidance will need to be updated to align with the intentions of the White Paper. This update is crucial to address the additional demands and needs created by the White Paper on local authorities.
- 1.3. There is a need to consider wider structural requirements to deliver the strategic intentions of the White Paper. This includes ensuring that financial implications are addressed, and necessary resources are allocated to meet new demands.
- 1.4. The annual allocation of the Housing Support Grant (HSG) makes the implementation of long-term strategic planning for the HSG challenging.
- 1.5. Overall, the Welsh Government's planning for the future of HSG needs to be addressing financial implications, updating guidance, considering structural requirements, responding to local authorities' concerns, supporting housing staff, and improving joint working with health and social care services.

2. Current and anticipated pressures in the delivery of HSG-funded support services, including pressures on the workforce.

- 2.1. The recruitment of staff remains a persistent challenge, with providers reporting a shortage of applicants and those who do apply often lack experience in the housing sector or in working with individuals who have complex support needs.
- 2.2. Additional funding and support for housing staff are required, including emotional and mental health support. There is a need for more specialist training and management frameworks to support staff in dealing with the increasingly complex needs of homeless individuals. This includes providing sufficient time for professional supervision and support.
- 2.3. There is a need to create career pathways within homeless services to recognize the specialism needed, with appropriate training and qualifications similar to social care staff. This should include benchmarking of staff salaries to ensure a fair and competitive approach to recruitment and retention of staff.
- 2.4. The number of people becoming homeless is rising, which increases the demand for housing support services, as a result Providers are experiencing rising service delivery costs, leading to a funding shortfall that they are covering with their reserves. They report this situation is

unsustainable, and without additional funding, there is a risk of returning contracts. Concerns about sustainability are growing.

- 2.5. Since WG only confirms HSG allocations annually, providers are worried about their ability to plan financially for the long term. They are voicing concerns over the rise in National Insurance contributions, and how this will be addressed in the long term.

3. How much is known about service performance, including data on outcomes.

- 3.1. Neath Port Talbot has a well-established evidence-based approach to assessing service performance. A range of returns are periodically received from providers, which provides qualitative and quantitative data on service performance. This data is also considered strategically by both Social Services and Housing, when planning and developing new services.
- 3.2. The implementing of feedback mechanisms to gather input from service users and stakeholders is crucial. This helps in understanding the real-world impact of services and making necessary adjustments.
- 3.3. Providers operating across various local authority areas have noted significant discrepancies in the types of information and data requested, as well as in monitoring methods. Developing standardized data collection and monitoring tools would enable a consistent approach to service performance and complement the HSG outcomes data, demonstrating how services are meeting the primary objectives of the grant.
- 3.4. The HSG outcomes are reviewed locally to assess if services are achieving the primary goal of the grant. However, it remains unclear how the Welsh Government uses this information, as there has been no feedback on the submitted data so far.
- 3.5. Overall, while there is a recognition of the importance of data on outcomes and service performance, there are also challenges that need to be addressed to improve the effectiveness of HSG-funded support services.

4. How effective is joint working between housing support services and public services such as health and social care.

- 4.1. The HSG is part of the social services commissioning unit, facilitating collaboration with adult and social care, homelessness services, housing strategy, community safety partnerships, area planning boards, and youth homelessness services.
- 4.2. There are opportunities to build upon the current effectiveness of joint working between housing and some other public sector organisations. In particular there are opportunities to further strengthen relationships and involvement from the local health boards and public health. This would ensure a whole population approach to supporting vulnerable communities.
- 4.3. Whilst we have good working relationships with Probation, there are concerns about the longer-term impacts of the “Prisoner early release” scheme and the “probation reset.” These individuals often find it challenging to obtain and maintain accommodation, and there is concern in respect of any reduction in the oversight and support for this cohort (either within the prison estate or as part of the probation support offer), which may add to the pressure on housing support staff.

5. What services should be commissioned in future to effectively support people with complex needs to find and keep a home.

- 5.1. Services that provide long-term support and are reactive to fluctuating needs are essential. This includes ongoing assistance to help individuals maintain their housing stability. Services need to be multi-disciplinary to meet the range of support needs identified, with specialist staff eg. substance misuse, mental health, and domestic abuse.
- 5.2. Mentoring programs and low-level ongoing support services are crucial for improving the well-being of individuals with complex needs. These services can offer guidance and support in navigating daily challenges and achieving aspirational outcome which are not necessarily housing related, such as accessing or maintaining work / training.
- 5.3. Early intervention and prevention services are necessary to stop people's needs from escalating. Adequate funding is required to appropriately resource these efforts and prevent entrenched and repeat episodes of homelessness.

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