

HSVP 14

Cymorth tai i bobl sy'n agored i niwed

Housing support for vulnerable people

Ymateb gan: Grŵp Gorchwyl a Gorffen y Gweithlu, sy'n rhan o Fwrdd Cynghori

Cenedlaethol Digartref Llywodraeth Cymru

Response from: Workforce Task and Finish Group, part of the Welsh Government

Ending Homeless National Advisory Board

Local Government and Housing Committee Inquiry response: Housing for Vulnerable People

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About us/me: I am responding in my capacity as Chair of the Workforce Task and Finish Group which forms part of the Welsh Government Ending Homeless National Advisory Board. In 2021, the Welsh Government published its Ending Homelessness Action Plan, which committed to 'Develop a resilient and valued workforce recognised for their expertise'. The work which we undertake forms recommendations to Government about changes needed to support the Government ambition to end Homelessness in Wales and the commitments in the Action plan.

The Workforce task and finish group has been focusing on key areas of work which are challenges for the Homeless Housing Support sector workforce, and include; workforce recognition which includes pay, skills and qualifications, short term nature of employment; lack of time resource and capacity to provide the reflective practice and support needed when staff have experienced trauma in the workplace; the need for commissioning services to be able to resource what would be considered to be standard good employment practices in other sectors.

I would be delighted to give oral evidence to the enquiry in this role, should you feel that my contribution could be helpful to the committee?

(I am also the CEO of ClwydAlyn Housing Association. We are commissioned to deliver services for those experiencing the threat of homelessness; those who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. We provide specialist services such as those for people fleeing domestic abuse; those with substance misuse issues; mums and babies and those young people who have become homeless between the ages of 16-17 as well as many "general" services for adults. We employ circa 150 staff working across 13 different services).

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

The Housing Support grant is intended to meet the Housing Support needs for people who: are vulnerable due to their young age; • are homeless, or sleeping rough; • are addicted to drugs or alcohol; • have poor social skills or disruptive behaviour; • have behaviour that puts them at risk of offending; • are leaving institutions (including some ex-offenders released from prison); • are experiencing psychological trauma (including that caused by domestic violence) • have mental health problems; • have a learning disability; • have a sensory impairment; • are chronically ill; or • are frail due to age.

The increase of £13m in 24/5, (a 7.7%) increase and a proposed increase of a further £21m in 25/6, (an 11.5% increase), is hugely welcomed however; the budget is still inadequate to meet needs across Wales to support those experiencing homelessness and more importantly wherever possible to prevent it happening in the first place.

There is a desire by Government and providers for staff providing direct support to be paid the Real Living Wage. In 2024/5 Real Living Wage rates increased by 10%, and in 2025/6 the increase is 5%, (**and** this doesn't include the added cost pressure of the increases in employers NI, which will need to be funded, and in many organisations are adding significant additional cost pressures). So, although budget increases have been hugely welcomed, they are insufficient to meet the essential staffing cost increases to meet minimum standards with many small providers relying on the use of surpluses (which can only be spent once) to remain viable, never mind meet the significant pressures in the system for additional and new services. This also assumes that the Real Living Wage is the appropriate rate of pay for this complex, challenging and undervalues work.

Data collected by Cymorth demonstrates the pressures providers face

HSG provider data – December 2023

- 41% of HSG roles were being paid below the upcoming NMW
- 67% of HSG roles were being paid below the current RLW

HSG provider – October 2024

- 91% of support providers were paying the RLW
- But only 21% were able to fund that wholly from HSG
- The remaining 79% were having to subsidise the RLW using income from other sources

Over the last few years our communities and their needs have changed significantly; we have experienced covid and the long-term health and wellbeing challenges that has brought for the population; and in addition, the cost-of-living crisis and increasing levels of poverty and we have no up to date assessment of the need for Housing support services.

The levels of homelessness which local Authorities are seeing is unprecedented and it will be some considerable time before the rapid rehousing vision can be delivered. There is and will still be a need to also rely on hostel type and supported temporary accommodation, which all require sufficient highly skilled staff to deliver good outcomes for people and safe services for staff. There are currently many pressures in the system in terms of resident complexity and the need for specialist skills and safe staffing levels. There is currently inadequate funding in many services to achieve this.

The HSG budget needs to reflect the pressures from the increased numbers of people at threat of and experiencing homelessness who are placing untold pressures on Local Authorities. If Support services were funded adequately more people may not need to experience homelessness and many cases could be prevented.

Housing Associations believe that circa 70% of households require a level of housing support to maintain their tenancy. Only a very small proportion of tenants currently receive the support they need, leading to challenges in maintaining their tenancies. Many Housing Associations put considerable resource funded from Rent to provide these services but that takes resource away from meeting other priorities such as investing in energy efficiency and repair and maintenance services.

The transition to rapid rehousing is wholly supported as a principle, however, WG need to consider how we address whole system change with infrastructures in place to enable citizens to manage independently as part of the transition.

Rapid rehousing moves us away from accommodation-based services to person-based services which is absolutely the right priority, however for this to work, we will need agile support teams working outside of Mon to Fri 9/5, which will be more costly than current

models but which will achieve long terms benefits and reduce pressure in other statutory systems.

There is currently a disconnect between policy ambitions and the resources being made available to deliver those ambitions. Rapid rehousing requires ongoing significant capital investment to build more homes, and the aspiration to end homelessness requires significant increases in Housing Support Grant funding to prevent homelessness but also to ensure that when it does happen that it is rare, brief and unrepeated.

Current and anticipated pressures in the delivery of HSG-funded support services, including pressures on the workforce; I have described some of the service pressures above so will focus on workforce here: current workforce pressures include the following:

- Attracting and keeping good staff
- Complexity of residents leading to burnout of staff who may lack specialist skills and access to specialist support service to deal with the trauma they experience in the workplace.
- Short term contracts (grant is awarded annually from WG, and has been cut some years, and static others until recent times) reduce the ability for Local Authorities to plan for medium- and longer-term needs, and lead to lack of secure employment contracts for staff
- insufficient income in contracts to pay, reward and support staff appropriately
- Sector not recognised for specialist work it does (not got same public respect as health and care); which impacts priority it gets for funding/recognition of its preventative nature and good public value in reducing pressures for other more expensive services

A key enabler to achieve the Government aim to end homelessness is a valued and resilient homelessness and housing support workforce where people are:

- Fairly rewarded for the skilled, life-changing work they undertake
- Supported to thrive within a safe, healthy, inclusive, psychologically-informed working environment
- Secure in their roles, supported to develop and able to progress
- Recognised, respected and listened to by employers, public services and government

In North Wales alone last year (ClwydAlyn footprint), 6 Local Authorities spent 25.5m on temporary B and B and hotel type accommodation for those experiencing homelessness. Better funded HSG services could reduce some of this financial pressure.

Given the vulnerability of residents, this put huge pressure on staff teams that are often dealing with complex situations daily. Within ClwydAlyn, we are a Real Living wage employer; but when we look at comparable roles in terms of skills and complexity, in the housing sector and other sectors such as substance misuse, youth justice it show that staff are not recompensed sufficiently for the skills, complexity and 24/7 nature of the roles.

Cymorth (published 2022) have workforce data which demonstrates that 44% of the workforce are struggling to pay their bills, 79% were not putting the heating on, 11% were struggling to pay their rent and 7% had used food banks.

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

Contract monitoring varies from Local Authority to Local Authority. Some are very robust in their reviews whilst others complete a review that is more to do with ticking boxes (this is largely due to capacity within their own teams).

Regarding the HSG framework, currently, there are 4 Primary Outcomes (with 14 indicators) and 7 Secondary Outcomes (with 25 indicators). Overall, having 39 separate indicators makes for a very complex review process. Having a more streamlined outcome framework would enable services to spend more time working with citizens on a 121 basis.

There are evidence-based reports of the qualitative benefits to individuals of providing services which help prevent homelessness and support those experiencing it, through utilisation of the Housing Support Grant. (Cardiff University "Evidencing the impact of the Housing Support Grant in Wales 2020). The same report evidences the long-term savings to the public purse from the delivery of services to individuals which prevent access to more expensive statutory services such as criminal justice and Health.

The report demonstrates that Housing Support Grant generated net savings to the public purse in 2016/17 of £176.7M. there is a saving of £1.40 for every pound spent. (and for those experiencing poor mental health the saving is £5.20 for every pound spent). The figures show that in 2016/17 Housing Support Grant saved Health £138.7m, Social Services £120.6m and Criminal Justice £47.9m.

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

Increasing numbers of people who become homeless or are threatened with homelessness have very complex needs and require a range of services to support them in their journey to be able to live well and manage their accommodation. Austerity and the impact of increasing demand on a range of public services means that over the last few years thresholds to access services have been increased which makes it much harder to provide some of the more preventative services; and access may only be provided when people are in crisis.

There is much to improve in this space. To make rapid rehousing work, all services need to be better aligned and working toward a common goal. Too often, safeguarding referrals are made, and the response is that it is resident behaviour and as they have capacity, it is their choice

There needs to be a greater emphasis on prevention to reduce pressures on statutory services as at that point, costs escalate.

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

There is still going to be a need for traditional supported living services as rapid rehousing isn't the solution for everyone.

WG need to invest in more preventative services. We need more specialist workers to be funded and more floating support generally to enable people to keep and maintain their tenancies and live well in their local communities; as otherwise there are huge pressures on all landlords to go way beyond landlord/tenant responsibilities, and when these services aren't available then more tenancies end and the repeat cycle of homelessness continues for some people.

However, we also need to recognise that HSG should be low level support (in terms of these complex issues), and that specialist health and social care services should also be appropriately funded to provide specialist interventions.