



Local Government and Housing Committee inquiry into housing for vulnerable people

Written evidence submitted by The Salvation Army, February 2025

1. The Salvation Army is a church and charity which has supported people in need in Wales since 1874. We are now present in 36 communities across the country, and in particular work with local authorities and other stakeholders to provide specialist homelessness and housing support services in Cardiff, Newport, Merthyr Tydfil, and Wrexham.
2. We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to the Local Government and Housing Committee's inquiry into housing for vulnerable people. Our evidence is grounded in our experience of working with vulnerable people day in, day out.
3. Our evidence follows the order of the inquiry's published terms of reference.

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

4. In October 2021, the Welsh Government published its Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan guidance, with the expectation that local authorities develop and submit their rapid rehousing plans. The guidance states that 'A pre-requisite of Rapid Rehousing is ensuring there are planning arrangements to ensure: (a) enough secure, affordable accommodation available; and (b) enough of the right support available to assist people to secure and sustain settled accommodation'. However, our sense from the work of our Housing First (HF) projects across Wales is that offers of accommodation have remained stagnant.
5. The Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan guidance recommended that assessment of support needs be collected through four categories: low needs, medium needs, high needs, and intensive needs. The Welsh Government provided an excel tool to aid local authorities in capturing and analysing this data. It would be helpful to understand what this data is showing and how it is being used to plan service.
6. We believe that HSG should continue to be a ringfenced funding stream, but while we welcome recent increases in HSG, we believe that it does need to cover actual increased costs, including staffing costs.
7. We hope that the forthcoming Homelessness Bill will further develop our ambition as a nation to make homelessness be rare, brief, and not recurrent.

What are the current and anticipated pressures in the delivery of HSG-funded support services, including pressures on the workforce?

8. While we welcomed the Welsh Government's (WG) decision to increase HSG in its last budget, overall we, like our statutory partners, still find ourselves in the position of having to meet

demand for services which outstrips the resources available to us. We also see levels of complexity of support and risk becoming more challenging within the current staff structures.

9. In particular, in many places funding for Housing First services has remained static for several years. Wales has an exemplary model of HF but the real terms cuts caused by not increasing funding in line with inflation mean that we are not able to provide services as flexibly as we would like to: to cover direct costs we are now having to realign staffing structures with spending, resulting in the loss of jobs and limited service delivery capacity.
10. The Renting Homes Act presents additional challenges for the management of services, for example in limiting our ability to move residents within services for the wellbeing of themselves, other residents, and staff.
11. Working in partnership with Cymorth Cymru and other sector partners, we are trying to develop our workforce, to make homelessness support a more attractive career option and to ensure that the work of our staff is rewarded appropriately. WG has expressed support for the Real Living Wage for social care workers, but with no indication of where the extra cost of this is to come from. The Employers' National Insurance increase has added to this problem - it means in effect that more of the money that we recover from WG and local authorities (LAs) and thus ultimately from the Treasury in London now has to go back to the Treasury. It seems that LAs will be compensated for some or all of this extra cost but third sector organisations like ourselves will not, even though we provide services commissioned by, and therefore on behalf of, LAs.
12. We would like to raise a particular point about our position as a voluntary sector service provider. We have a sense that statutory commissioners have come to see us, and the faith/ third sector more widely, as people who will always step into a gap. We do bring added value to the work that we do but our own resources are not infinite, and we are finding ourselves increasingly stretched. Services have to be properly funded; they cannot rely on providers like ourselves being able to make up deficits from our own resources.

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

13. Research conducted by Cardiff Metropolitan University in 2020 found that HSG funded services had a positive impact on people's wellbeing and health, with every £1 invested in them delivering £1.40 net savings to public services in Wales.
14. It is often unclear to us how LAs use the HSG data that we return to them. There is no standardised format for reporting HSG outcomes to local authorities, many of whom require several additional reporting functions alongside the HSG bi-annual Outcomes Report. This creates obvious inefficiencies for providers, like us, who work across several authorities; and it misses an important opportunity to understand how HSG is doing. Some LAs just want hard outcomes, some want a blend of hard and qualitative data, and others require data on hours spent with each service users. This final approach is particularly challenging as it is heavily time consuming and really does not represent the quality and variety in work conducted with vulnerable people
15. We therefore call for the introduction of single HSG reporting model across all LAs, with a commitment to reduce the amount of additional/complimentary/LA specific data reporting requested. The model should include, ad a minimum, person-focussed stories about outcome, and better knowledge about what services are doing and how well they are doing it. The new HSG

Outcomes Framework is supposed to deliver some of these things but not all LAs have adopted it as their sole reporting function yet.

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

16. We can demonstrate examples of effective joint working with public services at 'ground level'. However, at present all statutory and public services- including criminal justice, health and housing- are stretched and under resourced. This has implications for the ability of all of us to work effectively together, especially at a more strategic level, because effective joint working requires an investment of time and resources.
17. The 2023 Homelessness White Paper proposed an enhanced case coordination approach, and a designated lead to ensure that people facing multiple disadvantage can expect a good level of communication and cooperation, regardless of the area in which they access services. This should be taken forward. A greater emphasis on co-funding and co-commissioning of services- robustly supported by the Welsh Government- WG level- could provide a greater impetus to make it work

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

18. It is common ground that there needs to be a range of services to support people with a range of needs. However, we would specifically like to raise the question of the need for permanent supported housing for some people- beyond the older people/ people with learning difficulties/ people with mental health problems who are, we believe, covered by the existing permanent supported category within HSG.
19. We find this need particularly in Housing First work. Some LAs are asking us why people who have been receiving HF support for some years are not dropping down to lower levels of support, or indeed ceasing to require support altogether. However, we work with people in HF who could quite easily revert to a chaotic lifestyle without access to regular, relational, long term support. For a person who has endured perhaps 30 years of chaotic living related to complex needs, even 7 years of HF support will only take them some way to stability and greater independence.
20. We have to accept that there (and always have been) some people who may *never* be able to live without support. As one of our senior managers put it, in Housing First 'We aren't asking people to *change*, we're asking them to *function within society*'. Even being able to undertake tasks such as putting out rubbish bins for collection on the right day may be a considerable achievement- but one which requires regular input of support to maintain.
21. The Committee might therefore like to explore a further distinction between Housing First and Rapid Rehousing. Both are housing-led approaches and they are often thought to be more or less synonymous, but we would suggest that they might be distinguished in terms of what they do, who they are for, and the directions that they lead into:
 - Rapid Rehousing is good for people who need to be got *out of* the homelessness system as quickly as possible- for example, people whose main problem is the lack of a home and who could fairly soon return to living largely independently- and for people with low to medium needs in which tenancy support could be appropriate.

- Housing First is housing-led provision for vulnerable people who need ongoing support to enable them to function within society and achieve a degree of stability: this support will be required for a longer period and possibly for life.

Conclusion

22. Wales has a proud tradition of innovation in housing and support services for vulnerable people. While we recognise that both WG and LAs operate under funding pressures, we hope that this tradition can be maintained. It is essential that legislation and initiatives such as the 2023 White Paper, the Renting Homes Act, rapid rehousing, Housing First, and the forthcoming Homelessness Bill, are aligned to complement and reinforce each other.
23. The Salvation Army remains committed to playing its part in this tradition, and to working with vulnerable people in Wales who are in need of housing and support as we have done for the past 150 years.
24. But in order to do this work properly, we need to have sufficient and supportive structures and resources.