

Housing support for vulnerable people

Engagement findings

March 2025



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1. Engagement summary

The following engagement summary provides an overview of the engagement programme design, delivery, and key findings.

Background

1. In its meeting on 5 December 2024, the Local Government and Housing Committee agreed the terms of reference and approach to engagement for its inquiry into housing support for vulnerable people.
2. The Citizen Engagement Team proposed a qualitative approach to engagement, comprising a series of focus groups and interviews with people accessing housing services and frontline workers responsible for delivering those services.
3. This paper is based upon contributions made during seven focus groups, four one-to-one interviews and one follow-up written contribution.
4. The programme of engagement involved 118 contributors across all five Senedd regions and took place between 13 – 27 February 2025.
5. This paper summarises the key themes which emerged from the engagement.

2. Engagement findings

Availability and suitability of housing provision

6. Contributors throughout the programme of engagement emphasised that a key challenge in providing housing support for vulnerable individuals exists at the most basic level: a fundamental shortage of available housing. This issue is prevalent across various types of accommodation, including social housing, the private rented sector, supported housing, and bed and breakfasts (B & Bs hereafter).

“In NPT, it must have been a Bank Holiday weekend. They couldn’t find a hotel space. . . Neath Port Talbot in particular don’t have a lot of



temps (temporary accommodation) so lots of people are booked out into Newport, Cardiff...but people won't go."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

7. While the lack of available housing is a major issue, it is exacerbated by the view that much of the existing accommodation is unsuitable for supporting individuals facing multiple challenges, often under significant stress, in living independently.

"... it is not just having the right location and it's not just having the right property. It's about the approach and what that property represents to the individual. When the local authority is moving people into completely unsuitable accommodation, when we as services are sat here saying someone deserves a cooker, which wouldn't even be conversation you'd have in the private rented sector, that's just a basic right. When those are the conversations we're having, when the bar is that low, how can we possibly expect people to sustain a happy and meaningful life when they are the standards that we're holding ourselves to? I think, again, within this legislation, so much of this needs to be focused around what's the ambition that we have as a country in the standards that we are keeping and the basic quality of life that we are providing to our society. Because at the moment, the provisions that we're providing people are just shocking. I think if people were to see those provisions more frequently, there would be uproar."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

"One of the main things we see people struggling with is there's no cooking facilities. So they've got a bed, but one of the basic needs of being able to cook is just not there. They're spending a fortune on takeaways. They've got no money to pay the service charge."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

8. Some contributors emphasised the harmful and recurring impact of placing individuals, who are fundamentally unsuited to living together for various reasons, in the same accommodation. The diverse needs of those requiring housing support are often overlooked, leading to significant challenges.

“Some of the placements are inappropriate. So we’ve got victims of sexual violence next door to people who are perpetrators of sexual violence and people who are trying to get off drugs next to people who are smoking crack 24/7. So even though it’s good they’ve got somewhere to stay, a roof over their head, a safe space...if something could be done to separate people who are in recovery, or victims of sexual violence, from those who are taking drugs and perpetrators, that would be good.”

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

“... people who maybe have been through the hostel system, they’ve been put in a property that’s not ideal for them and then they can’t sustain it and they’re back out on the streets, back in old habits, back in old lifestyles. Then they’re finding it very difficult to engage in more structured floating support services because they just can’t do it. It’s hard to feel ownership over a home you’ve not really had a lot of choice in selecting.”

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

Local connections

9. Contributors explained that the shortage of available housing has led to more people being placed outside their local areas, away from their support networks. This displacement affects their ability to work, their children's schooling, access to services, and their overall connection to the community.

“In Cardiff, they’re telling people to go to Newport and outside of Cardiff. Whilst logically I can see what they’re saying, these are people with personal connections and families and lives and you’re asking them to uproot themselves completely - often vulnerable people who’ve already got challenges - and dump them in a completely different environment because there’s no other solution.”

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

Managing expectations

10. One of the key themes that emerged from the discussions was the challenge of managing the expectations of individuals placed in temporary

accommodation, who often endure long stays with no clear end in sight. Navigating an already unclear process becomes even more difficult when individuals are expected to do so while managing a range of complex needs.

11. Some contributors explained that individuals placed in temporary accommodation are often initially optimistic, as they anticipate a short stay. However, as time passes and progress stalls, their mental health deteriorates, and their needs can become more acute.

“Mental health of the people who stay too long – that’s an awful one. In the lower needs hostels we have a lot of people who have been stuck there for 2 years now. 2 years is our mark and they should have moved out already by that time. Any time they get offered a flat, their mental health improves so much. They’re on the ball with everything, they do everything they need to do, they are lovely, they are happy, they are engaging...and then after a month, 2, 3, they don’t hear anything, there’s no updates. People have tried to take their lives because of how desperate they are . . .”

Focus group contributor, Gwynedd

“The quality of stock is really important but the waiting lists are such a fundamental part of people’s journeys, and when people are entering temp and they know that it’s going to be 2, 3 years before they’re even considered for something else, the level of hopelessness they face is huge. We’re seeing a rise in complex needs and wondering why that’s happening but we have people who have low level mental health needs who are in unsuitable temporary accommodation for 2 years. The conversations with their housing officers are few and far between, there is no sense of this is the process, this is the journey, this is what needs to happen for me to get to this step and they’re stuck there completely hopeless. And as such, their needs escalate and their complexities worsen because we as a system are not providing any kind of light at the end of the tunnel. There is no consistency or ability for them to know what their next steps are and what that looks like.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

“I think there’s a lot more young people coming in to the hostels from what I understand and again, this is anecdotal evidence, the young people coming into hostels – they’re not on drugs, they say they’re not

going to touch it, they're just going to get in and get out, but by the time they leave, they're on crack, heroin, things like that. Some of the women who come in end up becoming sex workers just to make money to pay rent. . . I think it's just a pretty dire situation."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

Private rented sector

12. In discussions about the availability and suitability of housing provision, most focus groups highlighted the particular challenges posed by the private rented sector, which mainly centred around three key issues: affordability, availability, and the quality of accommodation.

"The thing we struggle with is our hostel tried to promote getting people into PRS (private rented sector) tenancies, however we are finding the PRS very unaffordable. We can provide their bond but we can't be a guarantor and a lot of our residents don't have a guarantor. Or the landlord wants 6 months' rent in advance and we just physically can't afford that. We have a real issue with trying to move people on positively. . ."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

"What we're seeing a lot of is when there is a property that's available, there's so many people going for that property, there's such high demand. So you could have 20 people that's interested in that property and often we're finding that our client group are deemed as less favourable and these properties are given to other people so there's less chances."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

13. Several focus group contributors reported a marked increase in individuals and families seeking housing support after being issued a section 21 eviction notice by their landlord. The upheaval, coupled with rising rents, a shortage of available and/or suitable properties, and the escalating cost of living has left many facing homelessness. Most contributors who discussed the issue attributed this trend to landlords choosing to sell their properties due to the challenges of complying with housing legislation.

“We’re seeing all age groups coming through now with all the new legislation around private renting. Lots of landlords are just selling up and the people that are in these private rentals, sometimes have been there many years and they’re often of an age they can’t get a mortgage, or they wouldn’t be able to get a mortgage and there’s lots of stumbling blocks there.”

Focus group contributor, Neath Port Talbot

“We’re seeing huge numbers of people receiving Section 21 notices like no fault evictions. We have what we call cottage landlords, like maybe landlords who have one or two tenancies leaving the sector because they can’t, or don’t want to meet the regulations within the Renting Homes (Wales) Act.”

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

“What we have found since the new housing law has come out is we get a lot of families coming to us that have previously been privately renting. Through no fault of their own, they’ve been issued with a no fault eviction and placed in with us. What I’m finding is that landlords are deciding to sell up because of this new law which is obviously going to cost them a lot more money. . . I had one family who were in a property for years. They came in with us and then got housed on the other side of Swansea . . . they had difficulty getting their children to school, learning a new area, which was hard. That’s what I find as well, it’s the different type of clientele that are coming in now. It’s not just people with substance use or mental health, there’s a lot more families that have just come from the privately rented sector.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

- 14.** Some contributors regarded the various conditions imposed on prospective tenants as rigid and unattainable, seeing them as a significant barrier to accessing the private rented sector.

“The thing that’s happening a lot in Cardiff with the PRS is even if you’ve managed to find a property that you think you can just about manage to afford, a lot of the agents are asking for minimum income. So I had one client who had some equity out of a house, a relatively small amount, but they were offering to pay 12 months’ rent

in advance. They worked part-time and they said, “No, your income’s not big enough. You’re going to need to earn at least £36,000 a year”. So it’s impossible for people.”

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

Pets

15. Several contributors noted that restrictions on tenants having pets in the property posed another barrier, with some emphasising that pets provide comfort and support for many individuals.

“Another problem we’re coming against is animals. I’ve got a lot of clients who have dogs, they’re their support animals, they don’t want to be away from their pet.”

Focus group contributor, Neath Port Talbot

Rise in complex needs

16. All focus groups involving contributors responsible for delivering frontline housing services reported a significant increase in individuals seeking their support who have complex, multi-faceted needs.

17. This often resulted in the individual facing challenges to living independently and maintaining a home. This prompted contributors to call for greater transparency and more coordinated support from specialist services.

“Slightly separate but similar is the rise in complex needs and the multi-disciplinary approaches with people. We’re finding that a lot of supported housing provisions, which were previously set up to support individuals with complex needs, just cannot manage anymore. And obviously that filters into areas that are not housing specific, but the need for multi-disciplinary practice around their development is really important. Making sure those specialist services are in provisions at the point of developing and funding.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

“What we’re finding as the years go on is the complexity of the need. So we do tenancy related support and for me it’s mental health and co-occurring issues. So what we’re finding is that people are coming

to us with high levels of debt, high risk of offending or currently still offending, currently still misusing substances or are just not ready for support. So they have to go somewhere because hostels are full and TAs (temporary accommodation) are full. We're a medium level support, we're 9 – 5, Monday to Friday. . . When people are coming in with high levels of need it's hard to get all the issues sorted in a 37 hour week being one person with several complex people."

Focus group contributor, Rhondda Cynon Taf

18. When contributors were asked about the challenges faced by supported housing provisions, several possible reasons were highlighted, including turnover in the Housing Support Grant and staffing levels.

"There's a range of issues. . . training and provision really feeds into that, but also I think the extended waiting lists and accessibility of mental health specialist services and assessments. Learning support assessments as well, and safeguarding requirements have put additional pressures on those provisions, which means that the external support that used to be there is not available."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

19. Several contributors emphasised the critical distinction between intentionality and behaviour, and complex needs and mental health. They argued that this distinction was often misunderstood or overlooked, leading to punitive decisions that negatively affected individuals seeking housing support. The consequences of these decisions were far-reaching, and often included a deterioration in the individual's mental health and reluctance to re-engage with services.

"We're seeing a lot of individuals who have worked intensively with our services and other services, who have really significant complex and multi-faceted needs. But they're being seen as behavioural issues within B & Bs because the provision provided does not meet the requirements of people with complex needs. If they were in the right provisions, they would not have the intentionality decisions being made against them because services would be structured to manage those needs, but unfortunately a lot of people are falling short of those resources and seen as intentionally homeless as a

result. We would argue as a service that it's not due to behaviour but due to a lack of adequate provision to meet their needs."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

"A lot of our clients have really high needs . . . We found that Gwynedd Council will discard duty due to their high needs, because they can sometimes be aggressive and the Council has this strike system. It's like they don't understand our clients' needs, because often they don't know what they're doing is wrong. We want more trauma-informed people to work within the council and other support services because they're not really looking into why the service user is acting the way they are . . ."

Focus group contributor, Gwynedd

20. The cyclical impact of local authorities making decisions based on behaviours often rooted in complex, underlying issues had a catastrophic effect on many clients. These issues were further exacerbated by limited access to health services, characterised by long waiting lists and support which was conditional or not always readily available. For example, individuals with co-occurring disorders (the co-existence of both a mental health and substance use disorder) faced barriers accessing integrated substance misuse and mental health services.

" . . . with the discarding of duty, the reviews are so slow and most of the time our clients are getting put back on the street. We can't give out tents. . . It's really hard because there's no temporary accommodation that'll take them because they've got discarded duty so the homeless team can't put them in them."

Focus group contributor, Gwynedd

" . . . It's really difficult to get our clients to be seen by community mental health teams because if they're co-occurring, if they're using substances and drinking, they can't go and see the community mental health team because they want them to be sober. However, they've got addictions. There's not a lot of co-occurring services that can provide support for our clients. It's really important to bring that into communities such as Gwynedd because we've got massive rural areas and it's very difficult for people in the likes of the south of Gwynedd to access places. . . There's also issues with crossing counties,

so for example, we have someone in Aberdyfi which is right in the bottom of Gwynedd and their closest is Aberystwyth, but they can't receive support because it's crossing county lines and then their nearest one is probably then in Caernarfon or Pwllheli which is really far for them. If they can't travel, and have no money or no means to travel, they're stuck between a rock and a hard place. It's almost as if the system is failing them because there's no other options for them. It's really difficult as a support worker to say, listen we can't really do anything because there's no other option for us. I can't imagine how they feel. If we feel bad for not being able to help them, they must feel a lot worse."

Focus group contributor, Gwynedd

21. Many frontline housing staff in the focus groups highlighted that maintaining a home for someone with complex needs is far more nuanced than initially perceived. To maintain a home and lead a meaningful life, many individuals require support with life skills that others might take for granted.

"So some of the people we worked with had never lived independently. Some of the guys have been in the care system, then the prison system, then the hostel system, so we're talking about never really having had that space to develop life skills."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

"I take a lot of referrals for people who, even if they have been housed, they haven't got the skills to manage a home. It's that whole life skills stuff and that doesn't seem to be getting picked up by commissioned services in any way. So when they're looking at tenancy preparation there might be some very basic stuff done, but there's not enough being done, particularly around affordability, tenancy skills and getting people actually prepared. But then that ties into the point made around being able to get that evidence for long term health conditions, neurodivergence, because the local authority will only accept specific evidence on that. So there are many people we're working with who we know have got adverse effects from traumatic brain injury, complex learning difficulties but getting that assessment done for some people can take up to about 4 years and then getting the evidence for that, so they could be placed in accommodation that's never going to be suitable."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

22. More specifically, some contributors discussed the challenges posed by an increased move to online services.

"I think there's a massive digital exclusion issue as well. Everything relies on having data and the skills to be able to use online services. From applying for social housing to GP appointments, we're still dealing with lots of members who don't have the skills and the access. All our members have complex trauma and those services are not trauma-informed enough and there's not enough provision to support them."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

Collaboration between services

23. Discussion on the rising number of service users with complex needs was closely tied with the challenges of referring clients to specialised services and delivering effective, seamless interdisciplinary support.

"... what we really need to be looking at is ensuring that there is the right provision in place and that we are really focusing on that care coordination model and the coordination of services across different sectors to support the meeting of needs. Homelessness is not just a housing issue, particularly with the complex individuals that are coming across our services and it's so fundamentally important that we're exploring the multidisciplinary nature of this and the need for other services to work with homelessness services to support individuals."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

24. Frontline staff identified data sharing issues between services as a key barrier to effective collaboration. The lack of information being passed on often resulted in individuals with complex needs being placed in unsuitable housing, with staff admitting they were unable and or/ unqualified to provide the level of support required.

“We accepted someone recently and the risk assessment and the information we had seemed ok. The day she moved in they sent us an e-mail with the truth. It was another chaotic person alongside the other three chaotic people we’ve got. We need more honesty; we need more help when things are starting to unravel. We need people we can call on, mental health services. It’s not unusual for mental health services to come out and say to someone through a locked door – “Well if you won’t engage with us, we’ll close you”. The reason they’re not engaging is because they’re ill.”

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

“Some of my team is made up of a range of different professional partners, and one of them is the NHS, and the structural barriers to partnership working are so prevalent across the services. Some of the fundamentals like data and information sharing across sectors is unfortunately a massive part of the barriers of multidisciplinary working . . . Information sharing and governance is so incredibly important. Services and systems as big as the NHS Wales Executive are not going to change policies and practices without that being legislative and until those changes occur, partnership working is reliant on good individuals flexing the legislation, actually flexing the rules, rather than the legislation and rules meeting the need to be working in partnership.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

“I think that some of the way we work with services, there’s a lot of fear around breaching data protection, what can be shared and that’s a massive barrier to what comes across.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

25. Several contributors highlighted the challenges of securing GP appointments and helping individuals navigate the healthcare system. They specifically mentioned long waiting lists and the ramifications of missing appointments, particularly for young people.

“People are deteriorating and their complexities are increasing because they’re not able to get quick access to mental health

assessments, with the GPs kind of being a bit stand-offish and not pushing forward with assessments.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

“We also have issues with GPs around us, because a lot of the young people we support have chaotic lives, they don’t always go to appointments, but then when we’re trying to book appointments for them, the GP will say “We’re not going to give them an emergency appointment because they didn’t come to the last one”. We’ve had to have meetings with the GP and the manager to sort this out. This is often a lack of understanding that comes from other agencies, lack of joined up working.”

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

Impact on frontline housing workforce

“I’m 30 years in housing and so I’ve worked in lots of different areas and lots of different client groups. And in general, what I would say is that I’ve never seen it this bad. . . We used to be able to work with people holistically, so yes, housing was the primary function but we used to be able to assist with how to live a fulfilling life. . . It’s almost impossible to do that now. We are crisis managing constantly and I’m being completely honest, if I was young now I would get out of supported housing, because it is so stressful and so difficult to be able to get a win of any sort really.”

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

26. The challenges of collaborative working across services, combined with supporting an increasingly complex clientele with inadequate resource has led to acute and varied pressures on the workforce.

“I think the problem is that multi-agency partnership working sounds great but the reality of achieving it is not as realistic. I find that sometimes, I’m working for everyone. So I’m working for my institution, the public sector as well, because social services will put a lot on you to do with the client. You’re also working for the needs of the client and sometimes I feel like, we get paid a lot less but we take on a lot of strain and a lot of pressure from different agencies and

we're in the middle of it. Sometimes it's not really reflected in our pay packet, we're not really valued. I appreciate the Housing Support Grant reduces the need for public service intervention and I think the programme's great, but what about the staff that's being stretched with absolute massive caseloads, doing the job role of a social worker for nearly fifteen grand less a year? So I think sometimes it can be unfair and we get a lot put on us."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

27. Many support workers agreed that the nature of their roles has changed significantly, with many now being tasked with responsibilities outside their remit and beyond their expertise. Some contributors attributed this shift to the overwhelming demands on many services, which are under-resourced.

"With the partner agencies, I think there is a tendency to pass things on to housing support which are really things we shouldn't be doing. So I think because services are overwhelmed we will get passed a few things that are a social care task rather than a housing task, but because they haven't got the capacity or the staff to do that they will try and pass it on."

Focus group contributor, Wrexham

"They see us as care workers instead of housing support officers and want us to do more than what's in our remit, and we're only supposed to be supporting these people...it's about bringing independence back to these people not long term support."

Focus group contributor, Anglesey

28. Many contributors highlighted the stark contrast between the heavy workload and high-stakes decisions faced by housing staff—decisions that can be a matter of life or death—and the comparatively low pay they receive.

"You've got frontline staff in the hostels who are more or less on minimum wage doing a night shift, doing 12 hour shifts and the managers aren't in the hostels on weekends. You've got maybe two support workers managing overdoses, managing challenging behaviour. . . The turnover of staff. . . as soon as you get someone good that's trained up to a certain level, they think, well I could earn

the same money in a less stressful job. . . They're sometimes having to make life or death decisions on their own and they're paid pennies."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

"There's an incredible amount of skill in specialist, low-threshold and assertive engagement and I worry that's not really recognised that well by Welsh Government at the moment, that is specialist work. And the more I see of re-tender, especially of outreach services, they're re-tendered at a cheaper cost time and time again and actually you need people who have that resilience and that specialist expertise, and their salaries need to reflect that.

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

"You're seeing staff working in the homelessness sector at risk of becoming homeless themselves."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

Demographics

29. Several focus group contributors highlighted the demographic shifts among those seeking housing support.

Working families

30. While many contributors noted that people with substance misuse issues, for example, have long accessed housing services, the groups now seeking support have become increasingly diverse and include the working poor.

"We used to deal a lot with the welfare poor who were reliant on means tested benefits for their survival but I think more now because of the cost of living crisis and fuel prices increase, we're seeing working families now that are coming into housing support areas because they're struggling to manage their bills."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

"We're encouraging work but at the same time we've got a group of people that are no longer the welfare poor, but the working poor and there's not really anything in place to support them with, so sometimes it can be a challenge. So we tend to use the third sector

like the Trussell food banks and seeing a rise in the use of those considerably for all families where they're reliant on the support of food banks to meet their basic needs, which is quite disheartening."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

Young people

31. Many contributors across several focus groups highlighted an increase in young people accessing their services. This brings unique challenges—particularly regarding benefit entitlement, compulsory education, safeguarding, and access to mental health support

"We have some 16 year olds come in who are still part of compulsory education. They're trying to get there between appointments, but they're actually not entitled to UC and then the arguments around that are that this person needs UC, they need to have funds but are denied UC and we're telling them, well somehow you have to pay £15 a week to live here with housing benefit on top. It's this vicious cycle. You then finally get them on UC to be told you can't go to full-time education on a Wednesday at 12:00pm, you need to make your way to Cardiff Central and show up to an appointment otherwise you'll be sanctioned and your UC stops."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

"Our biggest challenge at the moment, I think since the start of the cost of living crisis, is our age group is much more heavily weighted than it was towards the lower end. We've got a lot of under 18s; many more than we used to. That's bringing a whole host of safeguarding concerns. . . For instance, one of the steps that social services are putting in place is curfews for all under 18s, but I think one of the big issues we face is a lack of communication between social services and the police. We are expected to report under 18s missing if they're not back by their curfew. So we do that, but then the police say, "But you saw them a couple of hours ago. They're not missing." They don't act on it and then it creates all sorts of issues with our relationship with the young people and our relationship with services. Service users sometimes don't understand the difference between us and social services."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

"I think with the mental health crisis and the increase in people we're seeing aged 16 to 21, there's a lot of young people who come to us who have massive complex mental health needs and actually the GP is just over-run. The wait lists are extensively long, so our young people can't access mental health services at the minute. We have a gap with under-18s, so a lot of the time, to access mental health medication through the GP, they have to be seen by CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). But the waiting list with CAMHS is 6 months, so the GP won't prescribe for under 18s . . . so we're stuck and can't do anything other than essentially wait until they're 18 to be able to access the medications and the provisions."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

Prison leavers

32. The issue of inadequate housing support for prison leavers was frequently highlighted during focus groups with frontline staff. Contributors discussed the challenges of finding suitable housing for individuals who are stigmatised, and often have complex needs that are unaddressed during their time in custody.

"We're caught in a situation where social landlords don't want them and have policies around it, private landlords also don't want prison leavers and they're Googling them or there's prejudice there as well. Additionally, a lot of their complex needs aren't addressed in custody so they're coming out and addressing them once they're in the community, which has its issues."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

33. Contributors with experience of supporting prison leavers' housing needs shared the challenges of navigating housing policies in both the social housing and private rental sectors, which effectively prevent prison leavers from accessing certain housing options.

"One of our issues is with social housing and their letting policies. They more or less blanket ban people with offences. So we've got very limited options to put prison leavers in."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

34. According to frontline staff, support for prison leavers before their release from custody was rarely prepared in advance. This is despite initiatives like HM Prison and Probation Service’s Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3), which is intended to ensure that no one leaves prison without an offer of housing.

“I think CAS3¹ (Community Accommodation Service Tier 3) was meant to eliminate that and it hasn’t. In Swansea at least, they just use temporary accommodation for CAS3. They find out on the day so all the things promised with CAS3 hasn’t come to anything, because I think one of the main things was finding out two weeks before release where they’d be and a lot of people have a lot of anxieties about being released. They already have to attend probation, substance misuse, meet us, Jobcentre and then find out where they’re housed. So I don’t think a lot of the schemes are working as effectively as they could be.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

35. Some contributors emphasised the importance of providing a stabilising environment for prison leavers, where they could, with support from specialist services, address their needs and other factors related to the risk of reoffending. However, many shared challenges in collaborating with key services, such as the police and HM Prison and Probation Service.

“We had someone recently who was actively offending and causing destruction within the projects and we thought was a risk to someone we had who was quite vulnerable. I was e-mailing probation trying to get support and I was just having doors closed. They said it was up to us to support, but we’re not police officers, we’re not prison officers, we can’t implement punitive measures. All we can do is report and record and it took us a lot of work. They needed to be recalled for their own health and safety. They needed to have that time to re-stabilise and come back out, but it actually took me going to the probation office, actually speaking to the manager and taking all my case notes and saying, ‘Why am I not being supported with this?’ Or why are they not being supported?”

¹ Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) offers prison leavers temporary accommodation and support for up to 84 nights, together with assistance to move into settled accommodation.

Focus group contributor, Rhondda Cynon Taf

Refugees and asylum seekers

36. Some contributors had experience of supporting refugees and asylum seekers with their housing needs. The challenges in supporting these specific groups included language barriers, feelings of isolation, a lack of connection to the local community, and severe mental health issues.

“We’ve had a few more refugees and asylum seekers through recently and certainly a handful of those have had duty discharged. It seems that they haven’t understood that they were only going to get one offer of housing. There seems to have been some misinformation generally.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

“We are getting referred people we actually aren’t qualified to support, even though we’re all trauma informed, it’s not enough for them. I’ve got a service user at the moment who is extremely suicidal and because of the type of environment here, it’s just not correct for them. They have no English speaking ability and have to get a member of their family to translate for them because of their unique dialect. That means they’re not able to actually access any mental health support because they can’t take the translation as being legitimate, that particular dialect, so I’d say in terms of translators and things like that it’s really difficult.”

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

37. Another important aspect of supporting refugees and asylum seekers with their housing needs is reuniting them with their family members.

“We predominantly work with refugees so we’ve had many people who have lost contact with their children. So once they’ve started their family reunion and they’ve found their children, it’s then their living in shared accommodation and they’re not living there with children unfortunately. So they have to present as homeless again. Whereas if they were able to rent a one bed or two bed property, they wouldn’t have had to move and re-start all over again. But they’re just not affordable. We have a lot of single people who are unmarried

but their partner is in another country and again, when they start a family reunion to bring their spouse over, they have to re-present because we only have shared accommodation to move people into, we don't have very many self-contained flats."

Focus group contributor, Cardiff

Other groups

38. Several other groups were mentioned by some contributors, but were discussed to a lesser extent across the programme of engagement.

"I think in terms of specific demographics, individuals with mental health and access to mental health specialist services is really limited. People with borderline learning disabilities and how that support is variant across local authorities, so people who need support don't necessarily get that consistently across local authorities. Traumatic brain injury is an enormous area with lack of support and often goes very poorly diagnosed because it can be difficult to diagnose anything up to a year post-injury. We find that creates enormous issues with emotional regulation. Then there's the dual diagnosis and co-occurring needs, which is enormous in particular."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

Discharge of duty

39. Some contributors explained that individuals they have supported with housing needs were being discharged for failing to pay their service charges. Others pointed out that many people were unaware they were required to pay a service charge, emphasising the extreme pressure these individuals face - dealing with housing instability, mental health challenges, substance misuse, employment issues, and benefit entitlements all at once.

"There's literacy as well. You finally get temp (temporary accommodation) and there's all these letters. Do people actually understand them? They're very wordy."

Focus group contributor, Swansea

40. Given this, they may not be in the right frame of mind to keep track of such details. According to some contributors, discharging someone for failing to pay a small service charge seems unfair, especially since it often leads to the person circling back through the system. The associated costs make the penalty for an unpaid service charge seem disproportionate.

“... I’m seeing people being discharged due to their behaviours or even down to not paying a service charge. And the service charges are not that much.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

“Some of them don’t know they have to pay a service charge and then they get a letter to discharge.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea

“They’re discharging people over £100. In the grand scheme of things it seems ridiculous. And ultimately if it’s somebody that’s been behaving overall, they’ll go back to Access Point and go back through the system and they probably will be put back into temp. But it’s just more trauma over just a £100.”

Focus group contributor, Swansea.