

Rough sleeping is the most acute form of homelessness and it's extreme manifestation. Homelessness is a condition that covers a range of scenarios and goes significantly further than those who are forced to live on the streets. The Committee has indicated they wish to focus their enquiry on rough sleeping and the causes of such. This evidence paper addresses the key themes identified by the Committee.

Effectiveness of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act in preventing rough sleeping

Section 55 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 defines homelessness as where someone has no available accommodation which they have legal access to or which they can reasonably be expected to occupy.

Rough sleeping has no strict definition, but is widely regarded as including people who are sleeping or bedded down in the open air; and people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation such as tents, sheds, squats or any other situations which are not designed for legal residency.

Local authorities are required to review homelessness needs in their areas and prepare homelessness strategies by the end of 2018. They will be required to address rough sleeping in those reviews and strategies.

The majority of people who are homeless are not on the streets. They are staying with friends and family or other temporary accommodation following the end of a tenancy or relationship, or as a result of a family dispute. Where a homeless person seeks help from a local authority, the authority will have to provide them with temporary accommodation if they believe they may be homeless and in priority need. Where the person is found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need, the authority will have a duty to secure them with housing.

Rough sleeping is not currently a priority need category. The Welsh Government Code of Guidance to local authorities on Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness advises authorities to consider chronic rough sleepers with multiple needs as vulnerable under the legislation, and therefore in priority need.

The legislation has been widely acclaimed for its success in changing the focus of local authority homelessness services to prevention rather than relief. The published prevention rate for the period July to September 2017 was 64%. Overall, since the Act came in to force data shows that almost 13,000 households have been successfully prevented from becoming homeless. The Crisis annual UK wide Homelessness Monitor report highlighted these positive achievements, although the report also acknowledges the recent rise in rough sleeping across Wales, which reflects a wider trend across the UK. It places this trend in the context of rising demand for homelessness assistance amongst single people.

The Wales Audit Office report, Managing Homelessness Demand, found variations in the effectiveness of how local authorities have planned their services since the

introduction of the Act. The report highlighted the difficulties faced by Welsh Government and local authorities due to the impact of key areas where policy is not devolved, including welfare benefits, taxation, immigration and criminal justice.

The scale of rough sleeping in Wales and the adequacy of data

The Welsh Government has worked closely with voluntary sector support agencies and local authorities over a number of years to establish a robust national annual count. As a result the availability of robust data has improved over time.

Initial one off counts in 2007 and 2008 provided one night snapshot data. These annual counts were discontinued due to the burden placed on local authorities in undertaking the count, and concern over the accuracy of the information they provided.

During 2014 a Rough Sleeper Working Group (RSWG) developed a new methodology for a rough sleeping monitoring exercise to be undertaken by local authorities. A monitoring exercise based on this methodology took place in October and November 2014, although the results were not published as coverage was not complete across all 22 local authorities.

Building on this, an annual monitoring exercise was introduced in 2015. The Welsh Government worked with local authorities to further develop the methodology and process which, after further enhancement in 2016, has remained unchanged for 2017. The monitoring exercise is carried out by local authorities, in partnership with other local agencies, to gauge the extent of rough sleeping across Wales. It consists of a two week information gathering exercise in October (Phase 1), followed by a one night snapshot count in November (Phase 2). The snapshot estimate can only provide a very broad indication of rough sleeping levels on the night of the count. A range of factors can impact on single-night counts of rough sleepers, including location, timing and weather.

The 2016 count data gave an estimate of 313 persons sleeping rough across Wales over the two week count period. Local authorities reported a total of 141 individuals observed sleeping rough in Wales between the hours of 10pm on the 3rd and 5am on the 4th November 2016 - the night of the count.

<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-rough-sleeping-count/?lang=en>

The 2017 figures were published on 1st February and showed that the estimate of 345 persons sleeping rough over the two week count period – an increase of 10%. Local authorities reported a total of 188 individuals observed sleeping rough in Wales between the hours of 10pm Thursday 9th November 2017 and 5am on Friday 10th November 2017 – an increase of 33%.

<http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2018/180201-national-rough-sleeper-count-november-2017-en.pdf>

The causes of rough sleeping and of the recent increases in rough sleeping

Homelessness is usually caused by a combination of structural and personal factors. There are significant pressures due to the limited availability of affordable accommodation, particularly for single people. The Committee has already received written evidence on the impact of welfare reform in its inquiry into making the economy work for households on low incomes, including a loss of 1.8% in net incomes from tax and benefit reforms for each household (or around £460 a year). These structural factors interact with personal factors such as relationship breakdown, unemployment, mental ill health, substance misuse, and bereavement, resulting in vulnerable people unable to navigate a difficult housing market and becoming homeless. If they have no relatives or friends to live with, they may end up having to sleep rough.

Data shows that of those households threatened with homelessness, the main reason cited was the loss of rented or tied accommodation, followed by parent/relative/friend no longer being able to accommodate them, and then relationship breakdown.

There is very limited research evidence on the causes of the recent rise in rough sleeping, although a small part of the increase may reflect improved approach to data collection. Contributory factors almost certainly include welfare reform - particularly reductions in entitlement to Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance, increasing difficulties in the affordable accommodation market as rents continue to rise (Crisis Monitor 2017), reductions and pressures on public services, and flows of non-UK nationals who are not able to access benefits (Rough Sleeping 2017).

The effectiveness and availability of services including emergency accommodation

Statistics show rising demand for homelessness assistance, placing increasing pressure on services. The number of households assessed as homeless under S73 has increased by 58 per cent from 6,891 in 2015-16 to 10,884 in 2016-17 . The number of households assessed as threatened with homelessness within 56 days has increased by 29 per cent (not 27 per cent as shown below) from 7,128 in 2015-16 to 9,210 in 2016-17 - link to data attached.

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness>

Outreach services exist in the larger urban areas, and they have daily contact with most rough sleepers, giving the local authority up to date information. There are also many voluntary and informal services which provide food and other assistance. Services funded by the Welsh Government are expected to be proactive in helping rough sleepers into accommodation. There is concern that some of the more informal services may be enabling people to sleep rough rather than helping them into accommodation, although that assumes that there is accommodation available to them.

The Welsh Government Code of Guidance provides advice on the need for emergency accommodation, including cold weather plans which are a condition of Homelessness Prevention Grant funding to local authorities. Specialist emergency accommodation is limited or non-existent in some (particularly rural) areas. The only

alternative may be bed and breakfast accommodation, unless a tenancy is immediately available.

There were about 40 unused emergency places at the time of the 2016 count. Some rough sleepers may be unwilling to accept emergency places, which are often only floor spaces with camp beds or similar. The refusal to accept an emergency space can be due to a range of factors including safety concerns, a lack of privacy and personal space, restrictions on behaviour, limited opening times, exclusions, a lack of accommodation for couples, rules on dogs, and geographical factors. Nearly all rough sleepers wish to be rehoused, but many are understandably unwilling to stay in emergency housing when they feel it is worse than sleeping out.

Some homeless people will be receiving support through a Supporting People service aimed at helping them live independently. Some will be living in a hostel, providing supported accommodation, be that a homelessness hostel or a refuge from domestic abuse.

The steps to prevent and tackle rough sleeping in Wales.

The Welsh Government currently provides funding of around £1 million for a wide range of services for rough sleepers through its Homelessness Prevention Grant programme. This includes outreach services, night shelters and day centres. In 2017/18 a further £2.6 million was provided to local authorities to support new service developments to tackle rough sleeping, and youth homelessness and related issues. Around £1 million of this additional funding is currently being used to strengthen services for rough sleepers such as outreach and additional emergency accommodation. The money is also being used to introduce a number of new Housing First pilot schemes, designed to help rough sleepers move straight into their own permanent homes with support. Some of this funding has also been used to commission research led by Shelter Cymru into the causes of rough sleeping and the experiences of service users.

The budget for 2018/19 and 2019/20 includes an additional £10 million each year for homelessness. Of this £6 million is funding via the Revenue Support Grant. Whilst it is a matter for local authorities to decide how to utilise their RSG funding to meet local needs Welsh Government has been clear that it sees this investment as providing long term, stable funding to support local authorities in delivering and expanding their statutory prevention services.

Grant funding of £2.8 million will enable local authorities and partners to support other services and projects which tackle the causes of homelessness and help prevent rough sleeping.