

This evidence paper provides the Committee with an update on implementation of the Rough Sleeping Action Plan, actions taken in relation to the recommendations from the Committee's report and an update on Housing First in Wales.

Context

The 2018 annual rough sleeper count was published in February 2019 and can be found at the following link:

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

Whilst it shows the one night snapshot count was much lower than in 2017, the figures are variable across authorities and the 2 week estimate is actually slightly higher than last year.

The Welsh Government has provided an additional £30m over 2018-19 and 2019-20 to help tackle and prevent homelessness, including rough sleeping. This has enabled a number of innovative approaches to be supported across Wales, learning from which will help drive policy and ultimately impact on homelessness generally, and rough sleeping levels specifically. It is too early to expect that the investment or individual projects would be reflected in significant changes to the rough sleeper data.

Rough Sleeping Action Plan

The Welsh Government published its two-year Rough Sleeping Action Plan in February 2018. The plan set out the Welsh Government's commitment to reducing and ultimately ending the need to sleep rough in Wales. It sets out a range of specific measures to be taken to this end. The plan is underpinned by a clear commitment to a preventative, person centred approach in both policy and legislative approaches to tackling homelessness.

To support early referral of new rough sleepers to services, and to help raise public awareness of how best to help a rough sleeper, we provided funding for a Streetlink promotional campaign, which commenced in April 2018. The campaign included radio, social media and billboard posters. Planning is ongoing for a further campaign beginning shortly. Work is progressing with Homeless Link and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHLCG), to make improvements to the back office functionality of the system underpinning Streetlink in order to make it easier for Local Authorities to provide feedback on referrals. The UK Government has commenced a review of the Streetlink service with which we are engaged to ensure more user focus.

The Shelter Cymru report 'Trapped on the Street', jointly commissioned by Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham Local Authorities and funded through homelessness prevention funding was published in July 2018. It identified a number of recurrent themes in the experiences of rough sleepers including that systems were considered difficult to navigate, high prevalence of support needs and trauma, particular difficulties for those resettling from institutions, a feeling that professional attitudes often lacked trust and could be cynical. We have since provided additional funding to the City and County of Swansea to work with Shelter Cymru on follow-up

research, which will focus on the journeys of local rough sleepers. This work is expected to conclude in March 2019.

'Trapped on the Street', in line with other research, underlined the importance of taking a trauma-informed approach and of promoting a culture which seeks to implement the preventative spirit and not just the letter of the legislation. We have invested in training to ensure that housing professionals have the knowledge and tools to operate in a trauma informed approach. Prevention - ACEs - Trauma-informed - Homelessness (PATH) training, funded by Welsh Government and devised and delivered by Cymorth Cymru has already been delivered to over 1,000 housing professionals from across third sector homelessness and housing-related support providers, housing associations and Local Authority housing, homelessness and Supporting People teams. Their positive feedback is supported by the evaluation leading us to invest further this year. The second tranche of PATH training is currently being delivered and will reach another 900 individuals.

We have also commissioned additional training, delivered by Shelter Cymru and the Homelessness Network, for front line staff to support them in the performance of their duties under the legislation. Importantly this training focusses on developing approaches that embody both the spirit and the letter of the legislation.

Development of the Housing Support Grant provides an opportunity for greater alignment of Supporting People and Homelessness Prevention Grant and guidance to ensure the most effective use of resources and join-up of services.

Cardiff Council has been funded to develop a peer mentor service to support rough sleepers. Learning from the approach taken in Cardiff will be shared through the Homelessness Network to inform wider roll out of peer mentor support across Wales.

Welsh Government has funded the development of a guidance paper on assertive outreach being taken forward by Cymorth Cymru. We expect to receive their draft in March. This paper will set out what makes assertive outreach effective and what the key components are for providing an assertive outreach service. The approach focusses on multi-disciplinary support that is persistent and purposeful with the primary aim of ending homelessness, it is also currently being trialled by Wrexham Local Authority with Welsh Government funding support.

Additional funding from Welsh Government has been used in Cardiff and Newport to improve access to safe emergency accommodation and improve move-on. In Cardiff, some of the funding has been used to create a safer environment in the Huggard and increase the support team in their night shelter. In Newport, funding has been used to proactively support people who are sleeping rough into sustainable accommodation.

Where homeless individuals are in agreement, local connection can be an effective tool in helping people to resolve housing issues. Work is currently in hand to develop guidance to support good practice in use of local connection which we expect to publish after Easter. This will support work being undertaken by the Homelessness Network to design a transfer protocol with Local Authorities.

Welsh Government worked with the Homelessness Network in early 2018 to ensure all Local Authorities had extreme weather plans in place and that the plans covered all aspects of extreme weather. Rough Sleepers Cymru have subsequently reviewed the plans and a report outlining best practice and recommending action in some areas has been drafted. They are currently securing the agreement of all partners involved prior to publication.

The first statutory Local Authority homelessness strategies were published in December 2018. Officials are currently reviewing the strategies and will provide feedback via networks and to individual authorities to help spread best practice.

We remain committed to updating the code of guidance to ensure it is clear regarding effective implementation of the legislation, including around local connection and priority need. It will also address necessary changes to allocations and eligibility and be an opportunity to reflect the very best practice including that demonstrated by the Step-by-Step approach. This work cannot be completed until uncertainty around immigration policy and eligibility regulations arising from the outcome of negotiations for exiting the EU is resolved. In the meantime, development of a separate and specific guide on local connection is in hand and the training commissioned through Shelter Cymru is providing practical support to improve front line practice.

We have commissioned an independent assessment of the implications of making changes to priority need. It is vital we fully understand the consequences, both intended and unintended, before determining whether changes are required. An open tendering process has been undertaken and officials are in the process of assessing applications. It is anticipated a review team will be in place by April 2019, with a final report due by April 2020.

Welsh Government is supporting the Street Homelessness Information Network (SHIN) project. As the project involves a number of partners and very sensitive personal information, we are currently working with SHIN to ensure all the right legal and data protocols and agreements are in place. Alongside this we are also supporting a complementary project to examine the feasibility and use of individualised data on statutory homelessness, led by Cardiff University.

In addition to work with SHIN and Cardiff University, work is also in hand to review and improve the annual data gathering exercise. As a result an additional clarification of 'direct access provision' was provided to inform the 2018 count, which may have led to some Local Authorities interpreting the emergency bed definition slightly differently. For the November 2018 exercise, Local Authorities were also asked to record details of any other form of emergency provision specifically for (people at risk of) sleeping rough which had not been recorded under emergency bed spaces as they were not direct access provision.

Welsh Government have continued to work closely with the End Youth Homelessness Campaign and other partners. We recognise tackling the specific needs of young people who find themselves homeless requires a unified approach from youth services, social services, education, mental health, substance misuse,

youth justice and other services and have announced a suite of cross-Governmental measures reflect this. The package includes £4.8million for an Innovation Fund to develop suitable housing and support options for young people.

To drive a collaborative approach at a strategic level, a Ministerial Homelessness Task and Finish Group was established in 2018. The group includes senior cross-sector and cross-portfolio representation, including health, social services and criminal justice agencies, to ensure partnership working in taking forward the homelessness prevention agenda. The Group is tasked with providing cross-sector advice, challenge and expert knowledge specifically relating to Housing First and Youth Homelessness, which will help inform the development and implementation of these policy areas.

On a practical level homelessness policy is increasingly being developed on a cross-Governmental basis. As well as the approach taken to Youth Homelessness where significant investment will be via education and youth services, we are also working closely with health and social care to integrate policy and practice.

An excellent example of innovative, collaborative and person centred practice is the Wrexham Community Care Hub. This innovative model which has been supported by Welsh Government funding, takes a truly person-centred approach to overcome some of the barriers to providing complementary service provision. All key partners are co-located for one day a week, which is reserved to support the homeless and rough sleepers only. This is a model of service provision we are promoting to Local Authorities and Local Health Boards when designing services for this particularly vulnerable group.

For example the high incidence of substance misuse amongst rough sleepers is well evidenced. Building on the progress made through the 2016-18 Substance Misuse Delivery plan we are now working on a cross Government basis to update the Support and Treatment Framework for People with Substance Misuse and Accommodation Problems.

Welsh Government are also currently developing a new 'Together for Mental Health' delivery plan and are working across portfolios to ensure it adequately addresses the needs of those who are homeless or rough sleeping.

Welsh Government continues to seek out ways to identify, share and promote best practice for example through our work with Rough Sleepers Cymru and other partners and through our support for the Cymorth Cymru homelessness symposium in November 2018, which focused on rough sleeping and provided a forum for sharing best practice.

Life on the Streets

Many of the recommendations set out in 'Life on the Streets' are co-terminus with the actions being taken forward under the Rough Sleeper Action plan. This section of the paper seeks to set out actions for those recommendations where progress is not already described above.

In regard to the ELGC Committee's recommendation 4, taking on board the Glyndwr Report findings we have increased the funding available to the Prison Link Cymru projects in both North and South Wales. This work predominantly focuses on retaining accommodation while someone is in custody. In addition, support for those leaving custody is a key component of the Wales-wide refresher training provided to front line homelessness officers. We are also engaged in regular discussions with the Ministry of Justice and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). Welsh Government has agreed to jointly fund a series of Accommodation Pathway Co-ordinator posts to raise awareness of, and further embed the National Pathway. The Ministry of Justice and HMPPS will also be key members of the new Task and Finish Group, which we are establishing to look at further ways to ease the transition from custody back into the community

Consideration will be given to the need and feasibility of alternative funding arrangements as set out in recommendation 6 in the context of wider considerations about the future of priority need given the relationship between priority need and local connection. The development of the Housing Support Grant also provides a unique opportunity to design the new funding stream to better support a clear strategic focus on preventing and tackling homelessness. The single grant mechanism protects the significant level of funding we have committed and enables flexible and innovative responses to be developed to address the multifaceted issues that cause homelessness.

As set out in response to recommendation 11 of the ELGC Committee Report, the Welsh Government has reviewed data on the number of allocations to homeless households by social landlords. We have also commissioned research into possession and eviction action which is expected to report in May 2019. The report will inform our ongoing work with Housing Leadership Cymru to establish and rollout best practise in providing support services. These services can then be targeted at the most vulnerable households, enabling them to remain in their accommodation.

Further to recommendation 12 of the ELGC report it is clear that increasingly Local Authorities discharge their duties under part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 through finding accommodation in the private rented sector (PRS). Over 3,200 cases were discharged into the PRS via assistance provided under the Act in 2017-18. Welsh Government recognises the importance of increasing access to this sector.

We have engaged with landlords and stakeholders to identify the issues which may prevent vulnerable people in particular doing so. These include landlord concerns that the introduction of Universal Credit may increase the likelihood of rent arrears as well as restrictive mortgage and insurance conditions which can make it difficult to rent to tenants on housing related benefits at all. It is also suggested that support for tenants provided by local authorities and others can be inconsistent. Officials are engaged with UK Finance to explore the issues around mortgage conditions and work is also underway to develop a potential new approach to accessing PRS properties for vulnerable households.

We have supported 'Open Doors' an award-winning project managed in partnership by Tai Pawb and the Residential Landlords Association which empowers landlords and tenants to reduce issues of inequality and discrimination in the sector. Materials

produced by the project, such as guidance or support to aid independent living, are hosted on the Rent Smart Wales website and the work has informed mandatory equality and diversity training for licenced landlords and agents.

We have also introduced the Renting Homes (Fee Etc.) (Wales) Bill into the Assembly. The Bill recognises that a PRS that does not function effectively risks increasing levels of homelessness by financially excluding those who cannot afford to access the private rental market, due to high costs. It seeks to address this by prohibiting a range of fees which are currently charged to tenants.

Following the decision to create a Housing Support Grant and the UK Government's decision not to devolve funding for short-term supported accommodation we have the funding stability that the Committee sought through recommendation 27. Welsh Government is working collaboratively with stakeholders to develop the new grant which offers a unique opportunity to streamline our processes and ensure that funding supports strategic planning at the local level.

Adequate resourcing as per recommendation 29 is vital and the Welsh government is delivering the additional funding needed to have real impact. The budget for the Housing Support Grant 2019-20 is £126.763m, which is made up of Supporting People, Homelessness Prevention and Rent Smart Wales enforcement. This is in addition to funding of £5.9 million used to support centrally funded homelessness prevention projects and the £10m allocated to youth homelessness.

Housing First

Feedback from the Housing First projects commenced during late 2017-18 shows that many were operating to *some* of the Housing First principles, but not all. Although short-term in nature, the projects demonstrated some success in getting people into accommodation and support the view that there is scope for both Housing First and housing-led or rapid-rehousing projects.

The feedback also suggests that Local Authorities under-estimated the challenge of putting a Housing First project in place, which meets the full set of principles. The one project which was demonstrably meeting all of the principles of Housing First was the Salvation Army run project operating out of Cardiff, which has now been incorporated into the Cardiff Trailblazer project.

Building on the early pilots, we have now established a Housing First Trailblazer fund. The rationale is that a new pilot phase for Housing First, over a period of at least 18 months will enable us to establish a firm evidence base from projects that meet the full set of Housing First principles. The Trailblazer approach will also provide opportunities to test new ways of partnership working with other services such as mental health and substance misuse to inform potential future wider roll-out.

As of the end of February, four Trailblazer projects have been approved which will see Housing First operating in five Local Authority areas (Cardiff, Conwy and Denbighshire, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf).

These trailblazer projects are in addition to projects being developed (or already being delivered) in-house by Swansea, Gwynedd, Bridgend and Ceredigion Local Authorities. In addition, the Wallich has operated a well-regarded project in Anglesey since 2014, the Wallich are working closely with the Housing First Network and Local Authority to ensure this project meets all of the principles of Housing First.

With Welsh Government support, Cymorth Cymru has established a **Housing First Network**, chaired by Crisis. The Chair of the Network sits on the Ministerial Homelessness Task and Finish Group, to ensure their work feeds into and is overseen by the Task and Finish Group.

To promote fidelity to the model, the Network has developed a ten point **registration self-assessment checklist** which forms part of the Housing First Trailblazer application process. The registration form includes the key principles and also contains a scoring template to assess a project's fidelity to the Housing First model.

A specification is currently being drafted for **evaluation** of Housing First in Wales. The evaluation will cover projects funded by Welsh Government, including the initial housing-led projects, and those being developed independently. It will focus on ascertaining the improvements made in client's accommodation, health and wellbeing as well the impact in relation to demands on other services. The current timetable estimates that the project will commence in 2019 with a view to reporting early findings in 2020.

As part of evaluation a desktop review of existing international evidence including the comparison of "congregate" and "dispersed" models, however we feel that the dispersed model would better meet the needs of rough sleepers in Wales.