

I am a researcher with Wrexham Glyndwr and did much of the qualitative interviewing for the Welsh Government's research into the effects of no longer having priority needs housing for prison leavers. During these interviews, a regular refrain was; "I spend up to 70% of my time just looking for accommodation for the offenders." I believe that probation offices used to have dedicated housing specialists who, apart from charities such as the Wallich, have been phased out. This seems a ludicrous situation. Many probation officers simply do not have the time to do their core job; advice, assist and befriend. No matter how many justice commissions tour the country and no matter how many questions they ask the people of Wales, unless there are enough people employed by the service to do specific jobs, such as housing and enough social housing built there will, forever be social problems.

One CRC officer spoke of a simple idea, but one that had not gone further than the 'middle management' block. Quite simply, with the introduction of Universal Credit, if someone is dirty, smelly and unkempt they may not be allowed into a bank, without a bank account they cannot claim Universal Credit. The idea was that each office had a couple of showers, some throw-away razors and a pile of clean clothes from Oxfam. So simple, so cheap, so not happening. I believe that to truly progress, thinking 'outside the box' and using simple but effective initiatives could make an enormous difference whilst utilising the ever-diminishing budget for social housing, probation and most social services.

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