



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales

2009 - 2019

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E1480910

CMK-22-10-123

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ISBN 978 07504 5239 7

Foreword

Our *One Wales* commitment to produce a Ten Year Plan to confront homelessness showed our awareness of the need to address one of the most significant social problems in Wales. As the economic downturn places increasing strains on individuals, families and services, we must maintain the momentum we have established in addressing this issue and its causes.

We recognise and appreciate the efforts made over recent years to tackle this problem, but we believe that there is more that can be done. That is why we have set ourselves the challenge of achieving a vision of reducing homelessness and its impact.

A key challenge to achieving our vision is to ensure that everyone can receive the help they need to avoid becoming homeless. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, we must ensure that the amount of distress, deprivation and disadvantage that can be caused is kept to an absolute minimum. To do this, services need to be easily accessible, readily available, designed around and responsive to the needs of the people who use them.

This Ten Year Plan is the result of extensive collaboration and consultation with individuals and organisations working within and across the range of sectors and service areas, as well as their service users. I am grateful to everyone who has contributed towards the development of this Plan. I am deeply impressed by the level of commitment and dedication that I have seen in those wanting to make a difference.

We will continue with this partnership approach, as it is only by working together to identify and undertake the range of activities needed that we can rise to the challenge of fulfilling the vision set out in this Plan. By achieving our vision, we will be able to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in their own suitable and sustainable home, which will improve life chances and strengthen communities for all of the people of Wales.

I am therefore delighted to publish the Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales, a policy that has been developed for all.

Jocelyn Davies AM
Deputy Minister for Housing

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Introduction

Purpose / Role of Plan

This Ten Year Plan sets out some guiding principles for the development and delivery of homelessness services. It is a working document and will be subject to continuous review in light of social and economic circumstances. At the time of writing, there is a downturn in the global economy, the impact of which is likely to continue to be felt over the coming years. This will pose particular challenges and make it even more important to ensure that service responses for those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, are as effective as possible.

A series of shorter-term, detailed, timed, action plans, will supplement this Ten Year Plan. The action plans will be developed on the basis of co-production by relevant partners, to encourage widespread acceptance, ownership and engagement in delivery across Wales. This is a Plan for Wales, not just the Welsh Assembly Government. Mechanisms for monitoring progress and measuring success will be developed during this action planning process, which will include the scrutiny of and accountability to the Welsh Assembly Government.

The *National Housing Strategy* will identify the framework and resources that will determine the future policy direction for improving the quality of people's housing in Wales. This will include more detailed information on how we intend to address issues such as the supply of and access to all tenures of affordable housing, which will have an impact on homelessness. As such it sits above, and will include reference to, this Homelessness Plan.

Overarching Vision

The change that this Plan is intended to drive is to focus our responses on the causes of homelessness. We want to offer sustainable housing solutions for all and to create a service and statutory framework that will support that. In ten years time we want to see homelessness reduced to a minimum. Prevention through early identification and intervention, as well as universal access to services, can reduce homelessness to exceptional circumstances. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, we want to minimise the trauma of the experience of homelessness through swift and appropriate service responses.

The strategic aims underlying this Plan, which encompass the broader vision, are:

- preventing homelessness wherever possible;
- working across organisational and policy boundaries;
- placing the service user at the centre of service delivery;
- ensuring social inclusion and equality of access to services;
- making the best use of resources.

Strategic Aims and Broader Vision

Preventing Homelessness Wherever Possible

Prevention should be the primary aim of all strategies and service planning to tackle homelessness. We want to ensure that everyone can access the help they need, when they need it, to find sustainable solutions to their housing difficulties and the underlying causes of these. There is a need to raise awareness of the services that are available, how and when these can be accessed, as well as how they can help to avoid future homelessness.

A range of good quality, effective, easily accessible and widely publicised housing and related services are needed. These need to work together, focusing on early identification and intervention and advising of all available housing options. This requires a reinforced focus on the assessment of needs when people approach services for housing assistance. This should be used as the basis for personal housing planning with a pathway to securing stable housing circumstances and addressing related needs and behaviours.

Working Across Organisational and Policy Boundaries

Statutory, private and Third sector service staff, at service planning and delivery levels, within and across service areas, all need to work together if we are to achieve our objectives. A list of related policy areas is included as Appendix A. Each of these policy areas are interdependent and mutually benefit from the early identification and intervention which can prevent the deterioration of the underlying issues. Effective information sharing protocols and referral mechanisms are essential to ensure that each can play a role in supporting the others to achieve their objectives.

The Welsh Assembly Government will provide a lead in setting the long-term strategic direction for services, which will focus on outcomes, whilst facilitating, encouraging and supporting a partnership approach towards delivering the Homelessness Plan. This will allow delivery partners the opportunity to take greater responsibility for defining the means of achieving our objectives.

The Welsh Assembly Government will work with its delivery partners to ensure that systems, processes and mechanisms used for gathering information on need and performance management are useful and accurate for planning purposes. The Welsh Assembly Government will also encourage the development and promotion of good practice, ensuring systems are in place to enable the identification and dissemination of what works, so that everyone can learn from each other.

Effective homelessness planning is essential to ensure services minimise the risk of homelessness. Local Authorities are required to incorporate this planning into their housing strategies, and their partners are expected to work with them to identify needs and plan the delivery of services. Local Authorities and their partners need to effectively plan to meet the needs of individuals and households at risk of homelessness. This needs to be evidenced through local strategic planning documents relating to relevant service areas.

A broad and diverse range of partners need to be involved in local planning, from Local Health Boards, Youth Offending Teams and employment services to Third sector providers and the private rented sector. Housing Associations have a particular responsibility to work with Local Authorities in tackling homelessness, as a major provider of social housing and a broad range of related services. Through the allocation and management of housing, as providers of temporary accommodation, partners in social lettings agencies and a range of other opportunities, Housing Associations have the capacity and responsibility to play a major role in supporting Local Authorities to prevent and alleviate homelessness. This challenge needs to be one of their core aims.

Placing the Service User at the Centre of Service Delivery

Homeless people have a diverse range of needs, characteristics and experiences, so a one size fits all approach will not suffice. Services need to be responsive to and designed around the varying needs of the people who use them.

Services should be provided to counter the factors that are placing individuals or households at risk of homelessness before they reach crisis point. There is already a level of awareness and understanding of these, which include:

- abusive and non-abusive breakdown of relationships;
- lack of security of tenure for carers and others living with friends or relatives, as well as some private rented sector tenants;
- poor housing conditions and/or overcrowding;
- financial hardship that leads to evictions for rent arrears or repossessions for mortgage arrears;
- lack of capability to sustain their accommodation, because of issues such as mental or physical illness or disability, substance misuse and young or old age;
- entering or being discharged from prison, care, hospital or armed forces.

A variety of communication and engagement techniques, sensitive to the language and cultural needs of service users, need to be developed so that services are approachable and inclusive. Services should be empowering, allowing everyone to have choice, self-determination and control, giving homeless people maximum self-sufficiency and support to help themselves.

Service users need to be enabled to play a role in contributing to the planning, design and monitoring of homeless services. Services must actively encourage and support service user participation, engaging meaningfully with their service users so that their needs are at the heart of service delivery and their views and experiences shape the way that services are designed.

Ensuring Social Inclusion and Equality of Access to Services

The Welsh Assembly Government has a vision of a fair and just Wales where everyone can live free from poverty, discrimination, fear or abuse. We will work with the new Single Equality Body to promote equality across all of our policies, including the delivery of this Plan. A central theme of the Plan is to promote equality of access to services for everyone, in accordance with their needs, and for services to be designed around and able to cater for the needs of all groups. However, in taking forward the actions necessary to implement the Plan, we will give particular focus to sections of society who are likely to be disadvantaged on grounds of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

It is a statutory requirement for public authorities to proactively work to eliminate discrimination and promote equality. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken to ensure that this Plan does not adversely affect or discriminate against any equality group and to consider how the policy may help to further develop equality. Raising awareness amongst the people who use, as well as the people who provide, services, can help public bodies understand their obligations and at the same time make it easier for the people they serve to ensure they are treated fairly.

Making the Best Use of Resources

All available public, private and Third sector resources need to be prioritised and targeted in a co-ordinated fashion to allow maximum impact and effectiveness in tackling homelessness. Local Authorities have a role to play, along with their delivery partners and the Welsh Assembly Government, in making the best use of existing resources. We must invest in those services which can demonstrate their effectiveness in contributing towards the achievement of strategic priorities. Investment through spend-to-save initiatives will also be needed to refocus our resources effectively. Local Authorities, along with their delivery partners and the Welsh Assembly Government, will need to consider the level of investment needed to deliver required services. In a finite resource environment, duplication must be cut to ensure the best strategic match.

Delivering the Vision

Providing Housing Advice

To maximise the benefit and effectiveness of housing and related services, they need to focus on helping people address the causes of threatened homelessness, at the earliest possible opportunity, rather than resolving homelessness once it has occurred. Preventing homelessness empowers service users, giving them more choice so that they can make their own decisions and maintain control of their lives.

It is vital that, in order to prevent homelessness, the right housing advice is provided before a situation descends into crisis. Where people are given clear information on how to avoid homelessness and the options available to them, they can plan their actions to find alternative housing. The focus of advice must primarily be on prevention.

There is a statutory framework in place to ensure advice is in place for those at risk. Local Authorities meet these duties in most cases through their own housing services.

In addition, there is a network of independent housing advice services across all areas of Wales, resourced by a combination of funding from the Legal Services Commission, the Welsh Assembly Government and/or Local Authorities. These have a role to play in advocating on behalf of service users, complementing and challenging statutory service provision.

What we want to achieve

We want to see the perception of services change, so that they become somewhere to go for advice and assistance with any housing related issue, rather than just somewhere to go when in immediate risk of, or already experiencing, homelessness. We want to ensure that a housing options and assessment framework is in place that takes into account all aspects affecting someone's accommodation, beyond, or in addition to, housing needs, so that appropriate services can be accessed to develop sustainable solutions.

We want to see a proactive approach to the provision of housing and all related advice services so that everyone can access the advice they need, when they need it. This will need to involve joint planning arrangements between Local Authorities, the Legal Services Commission and the Welsh Assembly Government, to deliver more efficient and co-ordinated provision.

Advice services should be a cornerstone of homelessness prevention strategies, working in a connected way to address the range of issues which impact on homelessness. Housing advice services need to focus on housing options available to the service user in the context of the local housing market.

Delivering the Vision

Developing the Private Rented Sector

The private rented sector (PRS) provides a significant and growing proportion of the total rented stock in Wales. It represents 11% of the total housing market and 48% of the rented market. Given the limitations on the size and investment in the social rented stock, it constitutes an essential element in the provision of housing for people who may otherwise be homeless.

Vulnerable people in housing need are often put off from renting accommodation in the private sector because of concerns around affordability, lack of long-term security, and the poor condition of some private rented sector accommodation. Vulnerable people can also find it difficult to access the sector because some landlords and lenders have concerns about the risks associated with letting properties to vulnerable and homeless people and those claiming housing benefit.

It is the perception of many private sector landlords that governmental interventions have been in favour of the tenant against their interests, as the focus has been on enforcement of standards. It is essential that this perception changes so that, whilst standards remain robustly enforced, partnerships can be created with landlords to reduce the risks associated with housing vulnerable people, who can become manageable for many quality landlords.

The PRS has a crucial role to play in tackling homelessness. Many people who would otherwise be homeless are assisted to access the sector by Local Authority and Third sector advice and housing options services. The PRS also provides a vital resource for placing people into temporary accommodation where a statutory duty is owed. Local Authorities and partners use a range of initiatives and tools to open up access to the sector for vulnerable people.

The Welsh Assembly Government is already working to promote good practice standards in the sector. *The National Housing Strategy* will set out the broader framework of policy for the PRS over the coming years. The challenge for future policy is to improve access to decent accommodation in the PRS, which is affordable and sustainable for vulnerable people.

What we want to achieve

We recognise the vital role that the PRS will continue to play in meeting the needs of people who would otherwise be homeless, as part of a housing market offering options for all. We wish to see a strong and growing PRS, which includes a range of accommodation that is accessible in all areas to homeless people. Advice services need to provide early and comprehensive information on how to access suitable accommodation in the sector. We also want to see housing and housing related support services support and assist vulnerable homeless households to access the PRS and successfully manage and maintain their tenancy.

We want to see Local Authorities systematically and strategically analysing and engaging with the PRS in their local area, as part of their work to tackle homelessness. This should include using a range of advice and investment arrangements, to ensure that landlords are provided with the support and encouragement that they need to improve their understanding of, and ability to let to, vulnerable people who may otherwise be considered as high risk.

We wish to reduce the extent to which people lose their homes in the PRS due to unlawful eviction, lack of advice and support, the need for mediation, and the lack of support for landlords to manage the risks associated with housing vulnerable people. Housing benefit services have a crucial role to play and need to be delivered effectively to enable tenants to have their claims settled and payments made quickly and accurately and landlords to receive their rental income promptly. Housing benefit services need to work closely with organisations that provide services to vulnerable people to ensure that the local implementation of the Local Housing Allowance allows appropriate protection.

Delivering the Vision

Improving Life Chances – Skills and Employment

The Welsh Assembly Government has a strategic aim in *One Wales* to work towards full employment and contains a commitment to implementing a labour market strategy with a long-term goal of full employment at a rate of 80%. The current economic climate presents particular challenges for achieving this aim, so it is more important than ever to maximise opportunities for training and employment for vulnerable people.

Homelessness undermines the ability of people to obtain or sustain employment, or to develop their skills by accessing education and training opportunities. Homelessness therefore impacts on their ability to improve their life chances. Conversely, engagement with training and employment creates the foundation for stable tenancies, from which people can seek to fulfil their aspirations and potential.

What we want to achieve

A core element of our vision for Wales is to sustain a strong and enterprising economy with full employment. To work towards achieving this, a joined up approach is needed, with the development of funding mechanisms which support preparatory training in employment and related skills for vulnerable people, including those threatened with homelessness, so that they can get involved with training and employment opportunities and maximise their potential to work.

Homelessness and other housing services have an important role to play in offering guidance to people on how they may get involved with these services. We want to see every unemployed person who receives homelessness assistance and support to be offered basic advice and referral to services which can help them to improve their employment skills and opportunities. Local planning arrangements need to ensure that housing and related services link with training and employment services, based on recognition of the need for a holistic approach to break cycles of homelessness.

Delivering the Vision

Maximising Financial Inclusion

People who lack the financial capability to make informed choices about things that impact on their daily lives frequently find themselves without access to reliable financial advice, bank accounts or affordable credit. This financial exclusion is one of the biggest causes of poverty and deprivation in the UK, with strong links to poor basic skills and social disadvantage. Financial exclusion impacts on people's ability to manage their income and expenditure. It can impact on their ability to gain or maintain accommodation, because financial hardship impacts on their ability to pay the rent or mortgage, as well as other costs associated with maintaining accommodation, including fuel poverty. It therefore has a direct impact on people's ability to prevent or address their threat of or actual homelessness.

A range of financial and debt advice services exist across Wales, provided by specialist and generalist service providers in the statutory, private and Third sectors, funded through the Welsh Assembly and UK Governments, the Legal Services Commission and private finance. Many households experiencing difficulties are not accessing these services or getting the help they need to prevent, or address homelessness. We face a challenge to ensure that everyone has access to financial advice to enable them to retain their accommodation.

What we want to achieve

We want to see joint planning arrangements across sectors to promote good practice in the development and delivery of a range of financial and debt advice services, to ensure that those who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, are equipped with the financial capabilities needed to make informed choices about their daily lives. To help achieve this the Welsh Assembly Government, working together with key stakeholders, will develop and deliver a *Financial Inclusion Strategy for Wales*, which will focus on 5 core themes including access to mainstream financial services; financial capability/literacy; accessible financial and debt advice; income maximisation and affordable credit and loans.

We want to see housing organisations playing a crucial role in working together with advice services, Credit Unions and others to promote the financial inclusion and security of their tenants and also to home owners who may be at risk, including minimising fuel poverty which contributes to homelessness. We also intend to deliver on the *One Wales* commitment to increase access to affordable credit across all Local Authority areas, with closer links between social landlords and Credit Unions.

Delivering the Vision

Minimising Mortgage Repossession

The current economic climate and persistent increases in mortgage possession action has made this an area to be addressed as a potentially major cause of homelessness. Financial de-regulation and increased sub-prime lending has drawn in economically vulnerable households. Many sub-prime lenders have encouraged people to borrow beyond their means and are quick and steadfast in their determination to take action to repossess properties when they default. Insurances do not protect all borrowers against periods of financial difficulty and cannot always save households from repossession.

Mortgage rescue schemes are currently in operation across parts of Wales by some Housing Associations. These can be in the form of shared ownership, which reduces the amount of mortgage payments for the joint owners, or a complete purchase of the property in which the former owner becomes an assured tenant and is able to remain in their home for as long as they like. There are also a number of private companies which offer sale and lease-back schemes. We are concerned where these may require home owners to sell the property at considerably less than the market value and offer little security of tenure.

In 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government introduced its Mortgage Rescue Scheme to provide an additional means to help home owners in the greatest need. This forms one of the main elements of the Welsh Assembly Government's Mortgage Rescue Action Plan to tackle this problem across the country.

What we want to achieve

We want to see more done to reduce the number of households that become homeless as a result of mortgage repossessions. We want to see the continued use of education as a means of providing people with financial capabilities, as well increasing awareness of the availability of advice services for people with mortgage difficulties.

We want to see comprehensive advice and assistance available to all consumers pre-purchase, which takes into account affordability and implications of changes in circumstances, as well as improvements in communications between lenders and borrowers where difficulties occur. We also want to see improvements in regulation and its enforcement, to ensure that courts only approve possession action when lenders have explored all other options to prevent possession being taken. We also want to explore, with the Financial Services Authority, the possibility of regulation for private sale and leaseback schemes.

We want to see the development of a protocol between Lenders and Local Authorities, which would require Lenders (with relevant permission from the household) to notify relevant Local Authority homelessness prevention teams so that action can be taken to assist households. We also want to see an increase in the development/availability of mortgage rescue schemes such as those operated by Housing Associations across Wales.

Delivering the Vision

Improving Health and Well-being

The links between poor health and homelessness are well established. Homeless children, young people and adults experience poor physical and mental health and poor access to health services. The Welsh Assembly Government acknowledges these issues and aims to tackle them through improved partnership working. Effective service delivery is currently hampered by variable or inadequate levels of joint working. Furthermore, structural barriers to accessing health services can include discrimination against homeless people. Homeless people experiencing mental illness, substance abuse, or both, encounter particular difficulties in accessing the health services that they need.

Poor health is both a cause and a consequence of homelessness. Without stable accommodation it is extremely difficult to engage people in treatment and ensure continuity of care. Other related social determinants include a lack of autonomy, poverty, social exclusion, unemployment and poor educational attainment.

The new *Ten Year Welsh Substance Misuse Strategy -Working Together to Reduce Harm* recognises that housing and homelessness prevention services have a vital role to play in helping substance misusers to access the accommodation they need. Housing must be seen as a core element of wrap-around services and be reflected in planning mechanisms.

What We Want to Achieve

We want a change of culture so that access to good health care and sustainable tenancies are viewed as equally important and interdependent, with each having a positive impact on the other, whilst addressing the wider determinants of health. We want to see short-term accommodation provision being viewed as an opportunity to treat underlying causes of homelessness.

We want to determine and then disseminate what works, through the development and implementation of a range of healthcare standards, so that all people who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation are able to access good quality health care services tailored to meet their individual needs. We need to extend good practice initiatives to form a comprehensive network of accessible services across Wales. We will promote partnership working, within and across agencies, at both strategic planning and service delivery level, building on links to improve understanding and develop joint protocols, aligned budgets and shared outcomes.

We want children and young people to be considered a priority group, where early interventions are more likely to succeed before unstable housing and/or health damaging lifestyles become established. We also want to see priority given to preventing homelessness amongst people with physical, mental health or substance misuse problems, enabling them to access the appropriate accommodation and services they need. We also need to ensure that housing standards promote health and wellbeing.

Delivering the Vision

Sustaining Tenancies

Helping people sustain their tenancies is one of the primary means of minimising homelessness. Social landlords and support providers have a particular responsibility to ensure that vulnerable tenants can retain their tenancies.

The Supporting People Programme has a vital role to play with the prevention of initial and repeat homelessness, by providing services that can help vulnerable households or individuals to address their accommodation and support needs. These housing related support services are tailor-made to suit the needs of vulnerable people to enable them to gain and maintain the skills and/or confidence necessary to gain and maintain accommodation.

It provides a model of commissioning based on needs assessments and monitoring and reviewing of services, which can assist with and be included within homelessness planning. It also encourages closer partnership working across the areas of housing, health, social care and community safety.

The Welsh Assembly Government will set out its priorities for the future development of the Supporting People Programme over the next five years through its Supporting People - Housing Related Support Strategy. The prevention of homelessness will continue to be a fundamental aim.

The prevention of homelessness should also be a central objective for social housing managers. Social tenancies provide an opportunity to help people escape a cycle of insecurity if the landlord can help them meet their tenancy responsibilities and support their engagement with other services to improve their life chances. The allocation of social housing and the management of tenancy conditions can have a significant impact on long-term homelessness amongst vulnerable people.

What we want to achieve

We want to ensure that individuals and households at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, as a result of their vulnerability, can have access to the services they need, in accordance with their needs, to help them to become capable of living independently in their own home. We also want to see the development of performance measures that reflect the importance of homelessness prevention and assess the quality of the service through the outcomes for the services users.

We want to see the development and delivery of a wide range of housing related support services, being innovative in their use of Supporting People funding to deliver flexible services capable of catering for the variety of accommodation and support needs of vulnerable households. These should be provided across a range of tenures.

Homelessness prevention should be an explicit aim of social housing management. Allocation of social housing needs to play a balanced role in meeting the needs of

people who are homeless and of others in serious housing need. Once tenancies are allocated, we want managers to help tenants address any risk factors affecting their tenancy and engage with appropriate services, so that repossession is only pursued as a last resort.

We want to see good partnership working based on a clear understanding of respective responsibilities to ensure that appropriate relationships are developed between the Supporting People Programme and statutory service providers in the field of health, social care and community safety.

Delivering the Vision

Addressing Rough Sleeping

Rough sleeping has proven to be one of the hardest aspects of homelessness to measure and tackle and presents a particular challenge in planning services. For some, the start of a period of rough sleeping represents the beginning of a downward spiral, often associated with unemployment, substance misuse and physical and mental ill health accentuated by difficulties in accessing services. There are often systemic barriers for rough sleepers in accessing mainstream housing, health and other services, as well as employment opportunities. Over time rough sleepers may become entrenched in their life style, undermining their ability to engage with services.

Outreach and other services for rough sleepers have increased over recent years, but access to night shelters and other direct access accommodation across Wales is patchy, and often unavailable to people seeking emergency assistance because of a shortage of supply.

What we want to achieve

We believe that no one should have to sleep rough. We want to see a range of joined up, outreach, drop-in and accommodation based services being delivered by housing, healthcare, employment and support service providers. These need to be person-centred, widely available, easily accessible and targeted at the needs of rough sleepers. These services need to be focusing on the ambitions, circumstances and potential of each individual service user. They need to provide a holistic approach towards addressing the practical and emotional, physical and psychological, social and behavioural needs of rough sleepers.

Services need to work together proactively to prevent rough sleeping, as well as encouraging the resettlement of rough sleepers, supporting them to reintegrate into society, fulfil their aspirations and become valued members of the community. We want to see the development of improved systems for monitoring and measuring the extent of rough sleeping, service outcomes and our success in eliminating the need to sleep rough.

Delivering the Vision

Caring for Veterans

People in the Armed Services spend much of their working lives in temporary service accommodation and it can be difficult for them to establish or retain a home for them to return to upon leaving Service. We have recognised this fact by extending homelessness legislation to Veterans under the Homelessness Priority Need Order. The UK Government is responsible for Veterans policy, and has a Veterans Strategy to improve resettlement. The Welsh Assembly Government is working with the Ministry of Defence, Third sector organisations and other homelessness organisations to encourage better connection in service delivery and ensure clear information is provided to Veterans at risk of homelessness.

The pathways into homelessness experienced by Veterans are varied. The four identified groups are: those who carry vulnerabilities deriving from childhood or adolescence; those who encountered difficulties within the Armed Forces, such as the onset of alcohol or mental health problems; those who had a successful career in the Armed Forces, but found the return to civilian life very difficult; and the fourth group who had a good career in the Armed Forces but who then encountered unrelated problems later in life; this last group was the most widespread experience reported by one third of ex-service personnel affected.

It is clear that a military background influences how Veterans experience homelessness. They are less inclined to seek or accept help given their tendency to elevate the perceived shame of their situation, which is a possible barrier in accessing appropriate public services. There is a clear need to ensure that Veterans and their families have prompt access to a full range of public services and get the most appropriate assessment and help to meet their needs.

What we want to achieve

We want to help co-ordinate and deliver high quality public services in recognition of the service our Veterans have given to our country. This must include ensuring our Veterans are encouraged to access the right services to help them secure accommodation, and that these services are linked up.

There needs to be improved access to Community Based Mental Health Therapy Services for Veterans, which will not only address the practical and emotional problems of homelessness, but provide a holistic approach to the physical, social, psychological and behavioural needs of Veterans who find themselves homeless.

Delivering the Vision

Reducing Youth Homelessness and Supporting Care Leavers

Young people experiencing the transition to independence face a whole range of challenges. They are particularly vulnerable at this time, and the success of the transition has huge implications for themselves and society. Care leavers, to whom Local Authorities have a corporate parental responsibility, are especially disadvantaged because of their early life experiences and lack of parental support.

Finding and keeping accommodation is one of the hardest aspects of the transition to independence. Unfortunately, many young people leave their childhood home in an unplanned way. They may lack family support or somewhere to return to in a crisis. Young people form a significant part of the homeless population and many more are on the fringes of homelessness, in insecure circumstances. Unless these circumstances improve they can quickly become at risk, as they find it harder to maintain employment or training, sustain their health, and become more vulnerable to substance misuse and other problems, including mental ill health.

Young people can face difficulty in securing private rented accommodation, as they may be perceived as a greater risk than older tenants. They are likely to have lower incomes, less capital, and are seen to be less stable in their lifestyles. At the same time they are less likely to be aware of how the housing market works, to know where to go to get advice, and have less developed life skills for sustaining a tenancy.

The Welsh Assembly Government places an emphasis on the development of our young people in *One Wales*. Our strategies to build the skill capacity of our young people and to address the issue of young people not in education, employment or training reflect this priority. A high priority for tackling youth homelessness is given through the homelessness grant scheme, amendments to legislation and guidance. Existing legislation provides statutory protection for many vulnerable young people, particularly for care leavers, although this does not ensure that they can find the housing they want or that they can sustain it. The challenge for Wales is to deliver a stronger more joined up framework of policies and services to address the needs of all vulnerable young people, including those at risk of homelessness, as early as possible.

What we want to achieve

We want to see homelessness planning giving a central focus to young people, to be included in the Children and Young Persons Plan and other local planning arrangements. Social services, health, youth and housing sectors need to be involved in these arrangements, as do young people, whose views on how services should be delivered also have to be taken into consideration.

We want to see well-developed joint working, involving statutory and Third sector organisations in the education, youth, health, social care and other sectors, in recognition that this is a responsibility that cuts across policy areas and agencies. We expect homeless young people to be assessed under both Housing and Children Act legislation, under duties to homeless people and as 'children in need'. Local Authorities need to be more vigorous and consistent in fulfilling this role.

Local Authorities must be more proactive in meeting their corporate parenting responsibility to looked after children, including helping them to prepare for independent living and helping them secure accommodation.

We want to see housing and related services being designed to be accessible to young people and focused constructively on meeting their needs. In some cases this means building up their capacity to retain their tenancies and find their own housing solutions, in others this means supporting them to stay at home in a supportive environment such as with their families. Particular focus must be given to engaging with hard to reach vulnerable young people.

The prevention of homelessness and addressing its underlying causes is key to promoting stability in young people's lives and helping them to build their futures. We want to see prevention work beginning as early as possible, including education work with all young people, to help them understand the risks of homelessness and how they can be avoided.

Where prevention is ineffective, we want to see young people having access to housing solutions which are age-appropriate and provide a safe environment to enable them to get involved with constructive activities, as well as opportunities to connect with life skills and vocational training. Younger and more vulnerable people will often need housing support, as indicated in our *Supporting People – Housing Related Support Strategy*, if they are to meet these objectives.

We want to see every vulnerable young person being supported by way of a pathway planning process to help them to prepare for independent living and access suitable accommodation and support. Where young people struggle in maintaining their housing, both housing and social services should work proactively to prevent breakdown of tenancy, or where it does break down, help them to find alternative accommodation and further resettlement support.

Delivering the Vision

Criminal Justice - Breaking the Cycle

It is widely recognised that prisoners and children and young people who offend are particularly vulnerable to homelessness upon release from prison. Over recent years prison leavers in Wales have experienced an improvement in the housing interventions they receive. Early interventions are addressing issues around housing benefit, rent arrears, and sustaining or terminating tenancies, which prevents homelessness. However, there are still many examples of inconsistencies which need to be addressed. Research has shown that there are clear links between the lack of suitable, settled accommodation and the risk of re-offending. Children and young people who offend are particularly vulnerable and in need of co-ordinated service planning to support their transition to independence.

The Welsh Assembly Government's main investment into addressing these issues is Prison Link Cymru (PLC), which was set up in April 2004 to provide co-ordinated services to all Local Authorities in Wales. The aims of the service are to offer assistance to prisoners who anticipate being homeless upon release from prison. This service is currently under review by the Welsh Assembly Government. Once completed this review should inform how resources can be more appropriately matched to services.

What we want to achieve

We want to see improved multi-agency working to ensure appropriate commissioning of services. This will ensure that appropriate models of service are identified, developed and delivered to meet the housing and support needs of prisoners. We want to see a range of assessment, advice, support and early intervention services being made consistently and widely available throughout Wales. This must be at all stages from pre-custody to reception into prison, pre-release and through the prison gates, as well as during the re-integration into the community, addressing the issues which result in homelessness.

We wish to see all accommodation providers (statutory, private and Third sector) giving due consideration to the impact that accommodation can have on a person's potential to become homeless and/or re-offend. They should aim to ensure that accommodation provided for prison leavers is suitable in terms of location and affordability, so that they can settle into a positive lifestyle, free from criminal activity. We want to see an enhanced role for the private rented sector in accommodating homeless prison leavers, with increased availability of support to improve the viability of this sector as a housing option for prison leavers.

We wish to see enhanced services to help former prisoners maintain accommodation post-release, address issues such as drug and alcohol misuse and find suitable employment, greatly augmenting resettlement into the community and reducing the likelihood of re-offending. There is a corporate recognition that achieving this will cohesively address the objectives of community safety,

resettlement of offenders and tackling homelessness, as reflected in the *All Wales Reducing Re-offending Strategy*.

Through implementation of the *All Wales Youth Offending Strategy Delivery Plan* we aim to ensure that co-ordinated service planning is in place to enable all children and young people who offend to have access to suitable, sustainable accommodation, to promote the use of alternatives to custody and ensure effective resettlement where custody is necessary.

Delivering the Vision

Preventing Homelessness from Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is recognised as being a significant cause of homelessness. It can have an adverse impact on family health and wellbeing and is a major factor in child protection cases. The effects of living with domestic abuse for children in particular can be linked to poor educational achievement, social exclusion, juvenile crime, substance misuse, mental health problems and homelessness.

The Welsh Assembly Government's vision was set down in the *All Wales National Strategy: Tackling Domestic Abuse – a Joint-Agency Approach*, which was published in March 2005. The principles that underpin the strategy include protection and support for victims, perpetrator accountability and prevention. The strategy provides an important framework for the development of local action and emphasises the need for multi-agency working in order to share information and best practise.

As a means of preventing homelessness, schemes that make properties more secure are widely recognised as an appropriate way to enhance the personal safety of the victim and support those who wish to remain in their homes. Where it is not safe to remain in the home, there are refuges operating, or in development, in every Local Authority across Wales, providing crisis accommodation and support services to people who have experienced domestic abuse. Floating support services also help to meet the housing and support needs of people who have experienced domestic abuse.

What we want to achieve

We want all people experiencing, or in fear of, domestic abuse, to have access to wide ranging advice and support services which enable them to live in their homes safely and free from fear. We want the first choice for people who have experienced domestic abuse to be to remain in their own homes. Where necessary, we want the further development of services that can make it safe for them to do so. We also recognise the need for all people at risk of abuse to be able to access suitable emergency accommodation, to protect them from harm and support them to move-on to a more secure home environment as soon as possible.

We want to see improved multi-agency working, effective information sharing protocols, and training for front line homelessness staff. We also want to see improved access to services that can cater for the needs of perpetrators, children and young people, people with disabilities, people of all genders, people in rural Wales, people who do not speak English or Welsh, people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, as well as people whose mental health or substance misuse difficulties necessitate a high level of support.

Delivering the Vision

Housing Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Asylum seekers and refugees, who may have already gone through some traumatic experiences, can have particular difficulties in respect of housing, health and education because of their language and cultural differences, which subsequently impact on their vulnerability to becoming homeless. Asylum seekers only become eligible for homelessness assistance and Local Authority housing once they have been granted refugee status. Under current UK legislation, failed asylum seekers and others with no recourse to public funds are not eligible for homelessness assistance and levels of destitution amongst this group are rising.

The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) provides support to asylum seekers in the form of accommodation, for those on the dispersal programme, or subsistence for others who have found their own accommodation. Once asylum seekers receive a positive decision on their asylum claim and gain refugee status, they have 28 days to leave their NASS accommodation. The Welsh Refugee Council delivers the Refugee Well Housing Project, which aims to prevent homelessness by providing specialist housing advice, as well as supporting and enabling refugees to move-on from NASS accommodation, to mainstream accommodation, within the time limit of 28 days.

What we want to achieve

We want to see every refugee have access to immediate support and advice once their application for asylum has been accepted. This needs to be based on close partnership working and communication between the Asylum Casework Directorate (ACD), the UK British Immigration Agency and the Third sector, particularly the Welsh Refugee Council. This needs to deliver improvements in move-on planning for refugees, as well as raising awareness of welfare benefits available to refugees and how to access these to avoid delays which can cause severe hardship and impact on a household's ability to sustain a tenancy. This will be supported by implementation of the Welsh Assembly Government's *Refugee Inclusion Strategy*.

We want to see the needs of refugees taken into account in Housing Strategy and Supporting People planning processes. This will need to ensure that assessments, advice and information about homelessness and its prevention are available in a range of languages. We also want to see the development of monitoring systems that can provide more information and a better understanding of the diverse needs of asylum seekers/refugees within each area.

Delivering the Vision

Tackling Rural Homelessness

Homelessness occurs in all areas of Wales, and the underlying causes are common across the country. However, there are distinctive features to rural homelessness which present particular challenges to homeless people and service providers.

The problem is often hidden because of the stigma that can be attached to homelessness and its underlying causes. People are likely to live in locations which are more remote from services and have greater difficulty accessing them. The housing options may be fewer, with limited access to social and privately rented accommodation in the community. Affordability ratios for home ownership are particularly difficult as house prices are disproportionate to incomes.

These issues pose challenges for Local Authorities and partners in establishing the extent of homelessness in rural areas and providing services which are accessible to people threatened with homelessness. The Welsh Assembly Government has recognised the need for particular measures to address housing need in rural areas, such as supporting smaller scale flexible homelessness projects and the work of rural enablers, and this will be extended during the course of this Plan.

What we want to achieve

We want all people in rural areas to be aware of the risks of homelessness and how they may be helped to prevent it. They should be able to contact housing options advice and homelessness services quickly when they are at risk of losing their home or if they do become homeless, using community based generic services where appropriate. We want to see the development and delivery of models of housing and advice services that can meet the needs of rural and remote communities.

Local Authorities and other agencies in rural areas need to work in partnership and where appropriate across boundaries to measure the extent and nature of homelessness in their areas and to share experiences and resources to deliver services and housing options which are accessible to people in rural areas. The Welsh Assembly Government will support them to achieve this and to improve the understanding of the problem.

Delivering the Vision

Enabling Move-On

Many people are placed in temporary supported or independent accommodation as a response to their immediate housing crisis. They often then experience difficulties gaining access to accommodation that meets their longer-term housing needs. Whilst in temporary accommodation, individuals and households can have difficulty accessing employment and essential local services, such as schools and GP's. This can undermine their ability to settle down and move on with their lives.

To maximise their ability to sustain accommodation, it is important that people can access longer-term accommodation that is suitable for meeting their needs, at an appropriate time. It is also essential that people receive the resettlement support they need during the move-on period.

What we want to achieve

No-one should remain in unsettled temporary accommodation for prolonged periods of time purely because they are unable to gain access to more stable longer-term accommodation.

We want to see local housing and homelessness strategic planning taking into account the need for move-on accommodation, with the involvement of all housing and support providers. We want to see Local Authorities leading a co-ordinated approach to move-on planning, monitoring the progress of households and individuals living in temporary accommodation so that those in need of more settled accommodation can access the range of housing options available, as quickly as possible.

We want to see the support needs of households that have been homeless being addressed within move-on arrangements, so that they have the best possible chance of being able to sustain their accommodation and avoid repeat incidences of homelessness.

Delivering the Vision

Improving the Statutory Framework

The statutory framework places legal requirements on Local Authorities to ensure a safety net and minimum standard of service provision for homeless people. It is essential to ensure that vulnerable homeless households are protected from harm.

The current statutory framework does not allow everyone to receive the level of service that they need to ensure that their housing needs can be met. The level of service that homeless people receive can be affected by inconsistencies around decision making and the interpretation and implementation of legislation. At times the legislative framework is a stronger driver for the service than the desire to be citizen-centred. The provision of advice is the minimum level of service offered, with Local Authorities being placed under a duty to ensure those who meet the criteria are provided with settled accommodation.

Law making powers for homelessness are in part devolved to the Welsh Assembly Government, although primary legislation remains with the UK Government. The Welsh Assembly Government recognises that the implementation of duties towards homeless people places significant burdens on Local Authorities. Any changes to the statutory framework could not be made until thorough preparatory work, including full impact assessment and consultation, have been carried out.

What we want to achieve

We want to see a statutory framework that supports the vision of all encompassing service provision. It needs to be shaped in such a way that it ensures that everyone can have access to the help that they need, to secure a home that meets their needs and provides a platform from which to address their aspirations. Services should be framed around the principle of being able to assist all people in housing need to access accommodation that is appropriate for their needs, rather than being shaped around the implications of the duties and processes of the framework itself.

We want the statutory framework to allow Local Authorities to develop and deliver services that are universally available to all, using a housing options approach to address housing and support needs, focused on the individual needs of each household, with an emphasis on homelessness prevention. With this in mind, we will undertake a review of key areas of homelessness legislation and the duties placed on Local Authorities, especially around the areas of priority need, intentionality, local connection and the discharge of duty into the private rented sector, consulting widely on specific proposals for amendments to the existing statutory framework.

Delivering the Vision

Conclusion

Tackling homelessness in all our communities is a key commitment in the *One Wales* programme for Government. This Plan focuses on the key areas for action to minimise homelessness over the next ten years. Through a truly strategic approach, which combines all the resources and commitment of Welsh partners, we can reduce homelessness and improve the experience of those in critical housing need. This means that this Plan is not only a statement of Welsh Assembly Government intent, it is a programme for all of us. To deliver the achievement of our vision, a series of detailed action plans and a monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed in partnership with all stakeholders, including service users.

Appendix A – Linked Policy Areas

This list is intended to highlight the cross cutting and interdependent nature of homelessness with other policy areas, where the mutual benefits of service improvements will be felt across policy areas. Over the life time of the Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales, each service area, at all levels of government, will produce its own strategies and plans to provide strategic direction and guidance for national and local service planning and delivery. Readers may wish to undertake their own enquiries to ascertain the priorities for service development and delivery across linked policy areas, which will be highlighted in the strategies and plans developed for these areas.

Health

Includes:

- mental and physical health problems and / or disabilities;
- chronic illness;
- substance misuse.

Social Care

Includes:

- older people;
- mental and physical health problems and / or disability;
- autistic spectrum disorders;
- chronic illness;
- children and young people.

Community Safety

Includes:

- offenders;
- young offenders;
- substance misuse;
- domestic abuse;
- social cohesion;
- gypsy travellers;
- migrant workers;
- asylum seekers and refugees.

Children and Young People

Includes:

- youth offending;
- education;
- child poverty.

Skills and Employment

Includes:

- education;
- training;
- lifelong learning;
- social enterprise;
- third sector;
- welsh language;
- leisure and recreation.

Regeneration

Includes:

- spatial planning;
- sustainable development;
- community development;
- economic development;
- business;
- rural development;
- planning;
- environment;
- transport;
- social enterprise;
- welsh language.

Social Justice

Includes:

- local government;
- public services;
- citizen engagement;

- financial inclusion;
- social inclusion;
- social cohesion;
- equality and diversity;
- gypsy travellers;
- migrant worker;
- asylum seekers and refugees.

Housing

Includes:

- housing related support;
- anti-social behaviour;
- tenant participation;
- empty homes.

