

Homelessness Action Group
Wednesday 9 October 2019 10:30 – 13:30
Hafan Cymru, Stephen's Way, Pensarn, Carmarthen, SA31 2BG

Minutes of Meeting

Attendees:

Jon Sparkes	Chief Executive, Crisis (Chair)
Katie Dalton	Director, Cymorth Cymru
Peter Mackie	Senior Lecturer, Cardiff University
Naomi Alleyne	Director of Social Services & Housing, WLGA
Clare Budden	CEO, Clwyd Alyn Housing
John Puzey	Chief Executive, Shelter Cymru
Glynne Roberts	Programme Manager, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB
Gaynor Toft	Corporate Manager, Housing, Ceredigion Council
Lindsay Cordery-Bruce	Chief Executive, The Wallich
Clarissa Corbisiero	Director of Policy, Community Housing Cymru
Nick Morris	Policy & Communications Manager, Crisis
Emma Williams	Deputy Director, Housing Policy Division, Welsh Government
Sarah Rhodes	Head of Homelessness, Welsh Government
Mark Price	Project Lead & Group Secretariat, Welsh Government

Apologies:

Tamsin Stirling	Freelance Housing Expert
Frances Beecher	Chief Executive, Llamau
Bonnie Navarra	Lead Change Maker, Future Generations Office

JS welcomed everyone to the fifth meeting of the Homelessness Action Group and apologies were noted. He noted that the first report of the Group has been received by the Minister for Housing & Local Government and a Welsh Government response to the report, and the report itself, will be published shortly.

1. Feedback on the recommendations from the report

JS provided a recap of the recommendations within the report – refer to the slide pack which accompanied the meeting papers.

It was noted that L C-B will co-ordinate the implementation of the short term recommendations in terms of being the “critical friend” and holding organisations to account.

Comments from the Group following the recap of the report recommendations:

- KD referred to the new guidance re Housing Support Grant and whether there are any key points the Group may wish to feed in to the consultation collectively.
- It was commented that the new Codes of Standard document is also being developed that this Group may wish to feed in to.
- A communications strategy should be further developed to highlight the priorities of the Group. NM will consider the existing strategy and how this may be updated to be able to easily communicate the detail of what the recommendations are and to ensure the key messages are clear for wider stakeholders. The communications strategy will then be circulated to the Group to note. **Action – NM**
- The Group also stated that an infographic to communicate the key messages would be useful & EW agreed to develop and fund this. **Action – EW**
- It was commented that local authorities need the resources to be able to implement change and other sectors also need to play their part with the Group “showing” how this can be achieved and implemented.
- Senior leaders in local authorities and the health sector need to be fully bought in to implement change.

2. Welsh Government response and feedback to the report

EW presented the draft response the Welsh Government is likely to give to the report's recommendations. By way of context she noted that the Strategic Policy Statement had been published following an oral statement from the Minister and that the call for organisations to 'Pledge' to work to the policy principles of the statement is being made on 10 October. Engagement with key stakeholders has already started – ie meetings with health colleagues/health boards, the four focus local authorities (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham).

The Minister will publish the Group's report along with the Welsh Government response next Tuesday (15 October), it will focus on the first five recommendations.

The key commitments that Welsh Government will agree were highlighted and discussed – refer to slide pack. A request was made for assistance from the Group with the drafting of the job descriptions for the co-ordinator and other posts that Welsh Government will fund. Conversations are starting in earnest with local authorities and a wide list of stakeholders has been established to engage with.

Comments made by the Group in the subsequent discussion were:

- Focus is on the “four key” areas, but other training will be open for other authorities and Welsh Government is open to discussion if other authorities wish to engage proactively with the approach. It was noted that this message needs to be communicated widely.
- Will be looking to facilitate round table conversations with key partners and stakeholders imminently in each of the 4 focus areas.
- Suggested that service user involvement should also be included in these conversations. Video clips of peoples' experiences may be powerful.
- Group members offered to be involved in the meetings with the four local authorities.

- Co-ordinators in each of the four areas will be key but must be resourced quickly with a “light touch” recruitment approach taken. Co-ordinators do not need to be employed directly by the local authority but must have a good working relationship with the authority.
- Housing support guidance should be a vehicle to join up health and housing.
- Connections are crucial between RPBs, APBs, housing association representatives and across the sector. There is lots of money in the system and this all needs to be aligned. Housing has to be recognised as a valid and credible partner in all these discussions.
- Need to understand the existing resources in the big four authorities and their priorities and how this work and funding complements that.
- Query whether there is additional money (ie from faith groups and charity organisations) other than just Welsh Government funding to drive forward the recommendations. It was discussed that providing these groups with a tangible role (ie providing and sourcing furniture for void properties) may be more beneficial rather than frontline action. There is an opportunity to put third sector resource in at an operational level in a collective and collaborative way with everyone driving forward in the same direction. This will need co-ordinating and the funding must be sustainable.
- We should give a really clear steer to what the co-coordinator and mentor roles should be and the Group should develop these. They should also monitor impacts of change. L CB will look at the job descriptions and the post could be provided by refocusing existing roles.
- The training needs to be delivered at the most opportune times (ie not when someone then has to go and work a night shift).
- Outreach training will be open to everyone and bringing in key leads from police & mental health services so they all understand the central aim. A spec is being developed for the training and the Group was asked to feed in any information that can help sharpen the spec.

3. Looking Forward

- Will revisit the “what framework of policies and plans” question next and consideration of how we address homelessness more broadly – refer to slide pack framework table.
- Consideration of “how” we address this question and the timetable for this work. By the end of January the Group’s next report will be completed to present to the Minister.
- Discussion about breaking the work into workstreams that people can lead on, as follows, in workshop mode for the November meeting to build a “starter for ten” and then build into draft proposals for January’s meeting. Workstreams are: (a) universal/primary prevention; (b) targeted and crisis prevention; (c) change management/workforce/perceptions emergency prevention.
- Recognition that the areas above (a-c) are bigger than just this group and need engagement with key devolved and non-devolved partners, and whether there is a different approach we can take to better engage these stakeholders (ie workshops at existing events taking place soon).

- Focus for each workstream would be: (a) ACEs, child poverty, right to housing, welfare and related work; (b) (may be split in two) targeted at schools, hospitals, prison leavers ie pathways, tenancy sustainment, no eviction into homelessness
- Members volunteered to lead the workstreams as follows: (a) Clarissa Corbisiero, Naomi Alleyne & Bonnie Navarra (b) Peter Mackie, John Puzey, Clare Budden & Katie Dalton (c) Tamsin Stirling
- Jon Sparkes and Nick Morris would work across all of the Groups
- Also need to consider what the principles are so that we can frame our recommendations in that way.
- We also acknowledged that there is a very small minority of people who for reason of safety (theirs and others') may need specialist provision rather than mainstream housing or Housing First either permanently or for a limited time. L C-B will (separately) produce a "what is the scale of the problem" piece of work that can feed in to the recommendations, and CC will feed in from a landlord's perspective.
- Communication will be considered as part of workforce and public workstreams.
- Change management is important (ie decommissioning of hostels).

4. Lived experience and front line worker engagement

- Professionals' survey still open for two weeks. Circa 170 people responded, and good split between statutory and support services. Crisis colleagues will analyse responses to provide some slides that than be used for feedback at events etc, and will also map where we are now heading.
- Over 280 responses to lived experience survey. Field work ending. Selection of preferences remain the same choices as detailed in previous minutes.

Separate discussion about "picking up the phone" to establish whether universities etc have allocation that could be utilised. Peter Mackie, Jon Puzey & Jon Sparkes to discuss.

Agreement that Group members can access an embargoed copy of the Welsh Government response to the first report, in order to be able to prepare media lines etc.

Mark Price
Housing Policy Division
Welsh Government