



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Strategy for Preventing and Ending Homelessness

October 2019

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Strategy for Preventing and Ending Homelessness

The purpose of this policy statement is to set out the strategic approach the Welsh Government is taking to prevent and address homelessness in Wales. The statement will be supported by an annual action plan, setting out the measures which will be taken across Government, working with partners, to address this issue. The action plan will be refreshed annually and annual progress reports will be published against the preceding year's plan.

Vision

A Wales where everyone has a safe home that meets their needs and supports a healthy, successful and prosperous life. A Wales where we work together to prevent homelessness and where it cannot be prevented ensure it is **rare, brief and un-repeated**.

Our vision is for homelessness to be a rarity and when it does occur, it is brief, the individual or household is supported back into accommodation quickly and sufficiently supported so that they do not fall back into homelessness; setting households up to succeed not to fail.

For that to happen, we need to help people in crisis so they can quickly enter long-term accommodation and thrive there.

We also need to shift much more of our energy and resources to preventing homelessness from happening in the first place.

We are clear, **homelessness cannot be prevented through housing alone**.

All public services and the third sector have a role to play in delivering this vision. All Welsh Government Ministers are signed up to this approach and we are asking all local authorities, Health Boards, Registered Social Landlords and others to commit to this as well.

Background

Homelessness is where a person lacks accommodation or where their tenure is not secure. Rough sleeping is the most visible and acute end of the homelessness spectrum, but homelessness includes anyone who has no accommodation, cannot gain access to their accommodation or where it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy accommodation. This would include overcrowding, 'sofa surfing', victims of abuse and many more scenarios. A person is also homeless if their accommodation is a moveable structure and there is no place where it can be placed.

Homelessness, or the risk of it, can have a devastating effect on individuals and families. It affects people's physical and mental health and well-being, and children's development and education, and risks individuals falling into a downward spiral toward the more acute forms of homelessness. The impacts can be particularly

devastating if a stable, affordable, housing solution isn't achieved and people end up having to move frequently.

Policy Principles

There are a number of principles that underpin our approach to homelessness prevention, we expect these principles to underpin the work of our delivery partners and to be reflected across public services;

- The earliest preventions are most effective and most cost effective and should always be the interventions of first choice.
- Tackling and preventing homelessness is a public services matter – rather than a 'housing matter'.
- All services should place the individual at the centre and work together in a trauma informed way.
- The duties in Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 should be the last line of defence – not the first - and all services should work to the spirit not simply the letter of the law.
- Policy, service delivery and practice should be informed and shaped in a co-productive manner and by those with lived experience.

Shifting the focus

Welsh Government acknowledges the need to move away from the 'staircase', earned rewards, model of service delivery.

We are striving to re-shape services around a rapid re-housing approach - shifting the focus of our policy, practice and resources towards long term housing led solutions, away from the provision of emergency, temporary and hostel services.

Context

Implementation of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 by local authorities across Wales has done much to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless – over 23,673 households since 2015. However, whilst prevention rates remain high at 68% in 2018-19, there are still far too many whose homelessness is not prevented and who are falling through the net. The demand on local authority services under the 2014 Act duties is increasing. In 2018-19 over 10,000 households presented to local authorities as at risk and a further 11,500+ presented as homeless and owed a duty.

The ethos of the legislation is prevention, but true prevention starts far earlier than the 56 days set out in the legislation. True prevention requires a holistic response from Government – it is not simply a housing issue. The homelessness legislation should be seen as the **safety net** when all other preventative actions have failed.

The nature of preventative interventions varies, as do the ways in which they are deployed. This is best described as a continuum. At one end, there are the broader, population-focused actions e.g. health promotion campaigns on healthy eating. At

the other is reactive crisis-type action required because a situation has become a very serious problem; a crisis e.g. acute hospital admission.

One way of describing this continuum is as follows:

- Primary Prevention - Preventing or minimising the risk of problems arising, usually through universal policies e.g. education; health promotion; good housing management and tenancy support.
- Secondary Prevention - Targeting individuals or groups at high risk or showing early signs of a particular problem to try to stop it occurring e.g. early referral to family or youth support services.
- Tertiary Prevention - Intervening once there is a problem to stop it getting worse and to redress the situation e.g. writing off rent arrears to avoid eviction.
- Acute Spending - Spending to manage the impact of a strongly negative situation - does little or nothing to prevent problems recurring in future e.g. cost of temporary housing when made homeless; long term cost of supporting children who have suffered Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as a result of loss of home.

Currently much of the focus of activity in the homelessness field is at the acute end, and if we are to achieve our vision, then our approach has to both support those currently homeless into accommodation, whilst also significantly reducing the flow of individuals and families falling into homelessness by investing more in primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

Our goals are therefore as follows:

- Immediate – Supporting those currently in crisis;
- Short / medium term - Shifting the focus to true prevention and rapid re-housing;
- Long term – Maintaining a system in which homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

Support for those already in crisis

There are a number of key questions we have to fully address in order to effectively support those already homeless or at the point of crisis. Firstly, we need to better understand the scale of the problem to ensure an adequate response. The statutory homelessness statistics provide part of the picture, but this only accounts for those individuals presenting to services. We know there are far more individuals who are hidden from services, 'sofa surfing' or in temporary and insecure accommodation. **Improving homelessness data** is therefore key.

Another key question is around the effectiveness of interventions to support people into accommodation - it is vital we support effective and evidence based interventions. The [Centre for Homelessness Impact](#) is co-ordinating efforts across the UK to improve the evidence base on what works, and we are linking with them to **assess and improve the impact of what we are doing in Wales**. This will enable

Welsh Government to provide clearer guidance to local authorities on the effectiveness of interventions and assist them in their commissioning of services.

We need to enable local authorities to take a single strategic view on homelessness in their local area and to genuinely work collaboratively with other public sector bodies and the third sector to address it. The move to a single **Housing Support Grant**, encompassing Supporting People and Homelessness Prevention, within a **Housing Support Programme**, is providing the opportunity for such an approach. It will require a single costed strategy at a local level and ensure a continuum of services to most effectively address local need.

Whilst services are commissioned at a local level, we also need to encourage innovation across Wales and Welsh Government will continue to develop national programmes which strive to bring proven approaches, such as Housing First to Wales. The **Housing First Programme** is aimed at assisting individuals with some of the most complex needs and given its resource intensive nature, is not going to be suitable for all. Housing First therefore needs to be part of a **whole-system** approach, focused firstly on prevention and where homelessness cannot be prevented, on the **rapid re-housing** of individuals into **long term accommodation** and moving away from the use of temporary accommodation.

A key aspect of a whole-system approach is the wrap-around support for individuals, particularly in respect of health services. This requires alternative service delivery models jointly owned and funded by relevant public services, including mental health, substance misuse, primary care, community safety and housing, to ensure **specialist multi-disciplinary teams** support individuals to address their needs and take a **trauma informed** approach.

A group at high risk of homelessness and often in a crisis situation are prison leavers, and fully **implementing the prisoner pathway** in partnership with HMPPS and local authorities is key to preventing a continual cycle between prison and homelessness.

True prevention and rapid re-housing

A truly preventative approach begins before an individual or family even becomes at risk of homelessness – it is about a whole system approach and involves investing in primary and secondary prevention.

Our approach to tackling youth homelessness takes such an approach. Primary approaches to prevention are well underway and supported through **education reform** in pursuit of the **four purposes** of our new curriculum and the introduction of the **whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing**, More targeted secondary prevention work, through **the youth service** and in collaboration with a range of partners, aims to identify and support young people who start to show some of the risk factors that can lead to homelessness. Investing in services at this early stage to support young people and their families will address issues before they escalate. We are also committed to ensure individuals successfully **transition from the care system** into independent living and that no one is **released from the secure estate** or **discharged from hospital** into a homelessness situation.

In the housing sphere, it is primarily about **increasing housing supply and choice**. We are committed to building social housing at scale and pace. It is also vital we improve access to, and the quality of, the **Private Rented Sector**. All too often housing management, supported accommodation and homelessness services do not work effectively together. Effective **housing management** is the starting point with good **allocation** policies which support the most vulnerable and ensure households are placed in the right accommodation and community with the right support – setting them up for success from the outset. Effective housing management also involves taking a trauma informed approach and supporting households to maintain their tenancies and avoid unnecessary evictions. Working with local authorities, Registered Social Landlords and the Private Rented Sector to **reduce the level of evictions and increase security of tenure for all** – with a goal of **no evictions into homelessness from Registered Social Landlords**.



In a preventative environment the focus of activity should be on housing management and housing support services, to prevent the majority of households reaching the point of requiring statutory homelessness services.

Rare, Brief and Non-recurrent

Whilst resources at present are focused on supporting those currently homeless or at crisis point, a shift in approach to earlier prevention will, over time, support a shift in the focus of resources. Resources will move away from the provision of emergency and temporary accommodation, and necessarily the number of hostels and emergency shelters will be able to reduce over time as demand on those services falls. Resources will instead be able to support long term, suitable housing solutions, as well as support services which intervene early and equip, support and enable individuals to live independent and prosperous lives.

Our vision is a Wales where homelessness is a rarity and when it does occur, it is brief, the individual or household is supported back into accommodation quickly and sufficiently supported so that they do not fall back into homelessness; setting households up to succeed not to fail

All public services and the third sector have a role to play in delivering this vision. All Welsh Government Ministers are signed up to this approach and we are asking all local authorities, Health Boards, RSLs and others to commit to this as well.

If your organisation is committed to this approach and would like to sign the Homelessness Prevention Pledge, please contact homelessnesspreventionpledge@gov.wales