

HO 05

Diweddariad ar bolisiâu a chymau sy'n cael eu cymryd i roi terfyn ar ddiwedd

Update on policies and actions to end homelessness

Ymateb gan: Crisis

Response from: Crisis

Our view on the effectiveness of the “Everyone In” approach put in place by the Welsh Government since the start of the pandemic and challenges maintaining that approach over the coming months

Our 2021 Wales Homelessness Monitor report surveyed all 22 local authorities and interviewed key informants in public and voluntary sector roles. The research found the Welsh Government approach to support people facing homelessness during the pandemic was ‘widely praised’.¹ The report attributes this effectiveness to a few different factors:

Firstly, at the very beginning of the pandemic, the Minister Julie James provided unequivocal guidance on the priority need status of all people sleeping rough, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds, stating that everyone should be accommodated urgently. This guidance was accompanied with the high-level political commitment and substantial additional funds needed to make this policy position a reality.

Regarding the sustainability of this approach, the report indicates that the majority of Welsh councils support the permanent removal of the priority need criterion, but fewer are in favour of removing the intentionality test, and local authorities are “overwhelmingly against” removal of local connection restrictions.² These views could prove to be challenging in the coming months as the Minister Julie James seeks to ensure that there is ‘no going back’ in this area.

Secondly, 21 out of 22 local authorities said that the Welsh Government’s protection of both social and private tenants from eviction likely minimised homelessness but the report raises concerns that “growing levels of rent arrears in the months ahead may test the Welsh Government and landlords’ commitment to end evictions into homelessness from social housing”.³

One particular challenge outlined in the Homelessness Monitor report is that ‘core homelessness’ is set to rise over the coming months. Core homelessness refers to households who are currently experiencing the most acute and severe forms of homelessness at any point in a given year. These include rough sleeping, living in hostels, being in unsuitable or unconventional accommodation, and ‘sofa surfing’.⁴ The Monitor predicts that core homelessness figures between 2021 and 2026 will be

¹ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Watts, B. & Wood, J. (2021) *The Homelessness Monitor: Wales 2021*. London: Crisis, p. xv <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/246434/the-homelessness-monitor-wales-2021.pdf>

² Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Watts, B. & Wood, J. (2021) *The Homelessness Monitor: Wales 2021*, p.xvii

³ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Watts, B. & Wood, J. (2021) *The Homelessness Monitor: Wales 2021*, p.xvi

⁴ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Watts, B. & Wood, J. (2021) *The Homelessness Monitor: Wales 2021*, p.xviii

higher than they would have been if the pandemic had not happened, with the economic aftermath of the pandemic risking a noticeable immediate rise in core homelessness.⁵

Indeed, although the pandemic is not yet over, we are already experiencing this economic aftermath in the form of increasing cost-of-living pressures. Rising prices alongside wages not keeping pace puts extreme pressures on those threatened by homelessness and these pressures may well result in an increase in core homelessness. Almost all local authorities (21 out of 22) surveyed in the Homelessness Monitor report expected to see increased need for homelessness support for people evicted from the private rented sector and a majority (15 out of 22) expected to see the same for repossessed homeowners and for newly unemployed people.⁶

We can also see pressure in the emergency homelessness support system, reflected in the most recently published Welsh Government statistics which show that at the end of November 2021, there were 7,238 people in temporary accommodation in Wales, including almost 1,800 dependent children. This was an increase of 162 people since October 2021, continuing a broad trend of increased use of temporary accommodation since August 2020. Over this period, the number of people entering temporary accommodation exceeded the number of people leaving temporary accommodation in almost every month: 17,300 people who were previously homeless were supported into emergency temporary accommodation but only 8,527 people were moved into suitable long-term accommodation. This is an unsustainable trend for services providing this support and as a general principle, temporary accommodation is not a long-term solution for people facing homelessness, as will be explored further below.

Beyond the Monitor report, we believe that further contributions to the effectiveness of the 'Everyone In' approach were the development of co-ordination cells and Welsh Government relationship managers which improved partnership working and enabled solution-focused attitudes. We are keen to see these ways of working continue as we return to business as usual.

Finally, it is important to note that our assessment of the effectiveness of the 'Everyone In' approach is limited by the nature of the data collected during the pandemic. A change in approach to data collection and publication means that it is difficult to compare pandemic figures to pre-pandemic data. With this in mind, we particularly value the Ending Homelessness Action Plan's intention to evaluate existing data collection arrangements and requirements to ensure they clearly and accurately illustrate progress towards ending homelessness.

The reasons for the apparent increase in the number of people sleeping rough and what can be done to reverse it

As explored above, the number of people in temporary accommodation is extremely high. We know that the provision of temporary accommodation is not a sustainable solution to homelessness as it does not provide people with a settled home. Consistent international evidence shows people using hostels and shelters find them "intimidating or unpleasant" and are "pessimistic" about their

⁵ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Watts, B. & Wood, J. (2021) *The Homelessness Monitor: Wales 2021*, p.77

⁶ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Watts, B. & Wood, J. (2021) *The Homelessness Monitor: Wales 2021*, p.108

helpfulness as a route out of homelessness.⁷ Therefore, we suggest that local authorities adopt a rapid rehousing approach, urgently placing individuals who become homeless into settled accommodation matched to their individual needs. This would go a long way to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and unrepeatable.

Also integral to the reversal of this increase is the general principle of prevention. The annually produced Welsh Government statistics showed a decrease in the number of households for whom homelessness was successfully prevented in 2020-21 compared with 2019-20.⁸ Whilst there was understandably a need to focus on emergency, reactive support during the pandemic, it is vital that public services now increase their efforts to maximising their potential to prevent homelessness.

To achieve this, Crisis supports the Homelessness Action Group recommendation that prevention duties should be extended across all public bodies to help achieve a 'no wrong door' approach to preventing homelessness.⁹ Homelessness cannot be solved through housing alone; therefore, all Welsh public services must work in a joined-up way across local, regional and national parameters to establish early 'upstream' prevention and stop people becoming homeless in the first place. This should include provision of psychologically informed, multi-agency support pathways, particularly for those at higher risk of homelessness.

Also relevant in this area is evidence that shows the criminalisation of rough sleeping and enforcement responses are ineffective and push people further away from homelessness support services. To this end, we campaigned in Westminster to repeal the Vagrancy Act which currently makes it a crime to sleep rough and beg in England and Wales and are grateful to politicians across all parties who supported this campaign both in the Senedd and in Westminster. We believe that the UK Government's recent decision to repeal will encourage people who are rough sleeping to engage with support as they no longer have to fear legal sanctions for not having a place to live. We would appreciate the Committee's support in ensuring that local government bodies are aware of the repeal when it comes into force.

Our response to the Welsh Government's Ending Homelessness in Wales: a high level action plan 2021-2026, including the timescales outlined in the plan and specific Actions within the plan that should be a priority for the Committee;

We responded directly to the Welsh Government's consultation on the action plan stating that we are broadly happy with the plan and its timescales. We agree with the four focus themes of making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring, and making sure partnerships are in place across public services in Wales to achieve this. We are aware that in the short term, it is likely that homelessness will worsen, but we believe that the objectives and courses of action set out in the plan are the right ones to ensure long-term change.

⁷ Mackie, P., Johnsen, S., and Wood, J. (2017) *Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review*. Crisis: London, p. x

⁸ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2021-12/homelessness-april-2020-to-march-2021-605.pdf>

⁹ Homelessness Action Group (2020) *The Framework of Policies, Approaches and Plans Needed to End Homelessness in Wales (What ending homelessness in Wales looks like)*: Report from the Homelessness Action Group for the Welsh Government, p.40 https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-03/homelessness-action-group-report-march-2020_0.pdf

Despite our general satisfaction, we did state within our response that we felt a couple of important areas of work were excluded from the plan.

Firstly, while the importance of meaningful involvement of people with lived experience of homelessness is acknowledged a number of times in the plan and will be relevant to many of the high-level actions, Crisis believes that people with lived experience of homelessness should be involved at every stage in the process of developing, delivering and monitoring the efforts to end homelessness. We would like to see the Welsh Government and public services use a ‘nothing about us without us’ approach to partnership with people who have lived experience of homelessness.

Secondly, Crisis supports the Homelessness Action Group’s recommendations for the Welsh Government to include social security policy and homelessness among non-UK nationals in a plan to end homelessness in Wales. While key parts of policymaking in these areas are reserved to Westminster, there are still potential interventions that the Action Group recommended the Welsh Government should consider in addition to lobbying the Westminster Government for UK policy change, namely:

- Reviewing the current ‘Welsh benefits system’ of devolved schemes and funds, ensuring they are aligned to end homelessness, and continuing to promote take up of reserved funds like Discretionary Housing Payments. This has been explored in detail by The Bevan Foundation.¹⁰
- Building on the pandemic response to explore viable options for supporting non-UK nationals, such as hosting schemes.

In terms of the Committee’s priorities for contributing to the delivery of the plan, we would suggest that the Committee prioritises the design of rapid rehousing transition process for local authorities to ensure its implementation is as smooth as possible. A good starting point could be looking at the processes through which the Welsh Government and local authorities will agree the estimates of housing and support need, accommodation supply and other similar matters.

Our views on the allocations in the draft budget 2022-23 that support ending homelessness, as well as those increasing the supply, availability and accessibility of housing in the social and private sector;

We welcome the definition of ending homelessness included within the budget allocations and are encouraged by the investment for development of an outcomes framework, model of prevention and rapid rehousing transition. We also support the overarching measures for housing supply and workforce improvements.

Our views on priority areas for the Green Paper on legislative reform, which is expected to be published by the Welsh Government in 2022, and areas the Committee should focus its scrutiny on;

¹⁰ Bevan Foundation, <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Case-for-Welsh-Bens-Report-2.pdf>

Crisis has previously set out the ideal legal framework to support ending homelessness.¹¹ Part of this is to create a ‘no one left out’ approach to homelessness support that Crisis detailed in a Wales-specific context:¹²

- No one left out from help to prevent homelessness, not just when people are at immediate risk but also upstream through support much earlier and through a wider public services response.
- No one left out from homelessness support when they need rapid rehousing help, which means abolishing the priority need, intentionality and local connection tests that currently exclude people from support because of who they are, how they became homeless or where they live
- A guarantee of self-contained emergency accommodation for people with nowhere safe to stay, which has been an invaluable part of the pandemic response and should continue.

We would recommend that the Committee reviews the work of the Scottish Prevention Review Group whose report provides guidance on how we can achieve collective responsibility across public services to prevent homelessness.

Our response to the recommendations made by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales in his report, Homelessness Reviewed: an open door to positive change.

We welcomed the Ombudsman’s report and recognised some of the themes from our own research. For example, in our 2021 Homelessness Monitor, most authorities that we surveyed reported that discharging duty via the private rented sector (PRS) has become very difficult. Half of the authorities said they found it difficult or very difficult to access social tenancies for homeless people.¹³

We hope that the adoption of the Ombudsman’s recommendation, alongside the Action Plan’s objective to develop the homelessness workforce will go some way to address the areas highlighted for improvement.

Submitted 24 February 2022

¹¹ Downie, M., Gousy, H., Basran, J., Jacob, R., Rowe, S., Hancock, C., Albanese, F., Pritchard, R., Nightingale, K. and Davies, T. (2018) *Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain*. London: Crisis.

¹² Gwilym-Taylor, R. and Sanders, B. (2021) *No one left out: The reality of eligibility barriers for people facing homelessness in Wales*

¹³ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Watts, B. & Wood, J. (2021) *The Homelessness Monitor: Wales 2021*