

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee
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Wales Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) was formed on 1 June 2014 as part of the government's reform of probation services. The CRC provides rehabilitation and offender management services to help reduce reoffending and protect the public across Wales.

We work with low and medium-risk offenders, managing their community sentences and providing them with knowledge, skills and support to enable them to stop offending.

In addition we also manage and support low and medium-risk offenders who are released from prison on license, including offenders who are sentenced to less than 12 months in custody.

We work closely with the National Probation Service (NPS) which was created at the same time to manage high-risk offenders, advise courts on sentencing and work with victims. We also provide rehabilitation interventions to some high-risk offenders managed by the NPS.

Each year Wales CRC supports around 10,000 adult service users.

Wales CRC is operated by Working Links who were formed in 2000 to help people with often complex needs to enable them to create better futures for themselves and their communities.

Identifying potential housing issues which could lead to homelessness

Our Service Users (SU) face a number of challenges on accommodation which can lead to rough sleeping. For example, those who are sentenced to custodial sentences may not be able to return to the property they previously lived in.

Wales CRC runs Through the Gate services (TTG) within Welsh prisons and within Eastwood Park where the majority of Welsh females serve their prison sentence. Our teams see all prisoners (both NPS and CRC whether sentenced or on remand) across Wales within five days of the initial assessment by prison staff. At this stage we can identify potential homelessness issues as well as activity which would help sustain them in accommodation. Such activity can include referral to services such as Prison Link Cymru (a Welsh Government funded provision) who offer advice and support in order to sustain people's housing benefit while they are in custody on short term sentences so that the property can be available on release.

The TTG team also interview prisoners 12 weeks before release, and again at 7 days before release and provide an updated resettlement plan to the probation Offender Manager (OM). If accommodation is identified as an issue, the TTG officer will complete a housing referral, supported by a risk assessment completed by the OM. This process, while not in itself securing housing, does ensure that the Homelessness Department of the Local Authority has initial information to enable a priority need assessment to be completed. On the day of release the service user is directed to report to local housing.

Additionally, we discuss our service user's circumstances during our regular appointments, including their accommodation needs and will record any changes in circumstances. We support those with difficulties through advice and signposting to local services and support agencies when we hear they are in difficulties.

We work with Justice Cymru, a pan-Wales consortium of expert housing providers, commissioning support for our service users as part of our supply chain. Justice Cymru is a joint initiative

operated by Gwalia, The Wallich and Clwyd Alyn. Any service user who is homeless or at risk of homelessness can be referred to Justice Cymru who will provide bespoke provision and support through direct delivery and through their extensive network of community partners and provisions. We have made more than 2,700 referrals to Justice Cymru. The services includes:

- A clearly defined process and structure that assess offender housing and wider support needs and identifies solutions to these accommodation based concerns
- Plan and document the clearly defined support including intended actions and outcomes to be achieved which ensures maximisation of or opportunities through statutory services, RSL's and community services.
- Deliver the agreed package of support, whether that is a combination of face-to-face interventions such as one to one advice or group workshop delivery or virtual via phone, skype etc., or activities completed on behalf of the offender
- Structured review of progress including service user feedback and the evaluation of agreed outcomes

1. The causes of rough sleeping and of the apparent recent increases in rough sleeping

- a) As of today (31 January 2018) our data confirms 635 SUs are homeless, 88 of these are described as rough sleeping. We are currently unable to say which of our SUs are reoffending as the Authority currently does not share the data from the Home Office database (PNC data) that it bases its reoffending data on. We can anecdotally say those that fall out of contact with us are more likely to offend.
- b) Our OMs report increasing difficulties for service users to access accommodation. We signpost our service users to support available in the local area and will discuss the issues service users are facing as part of our probation service.
- c) Offenders are no longer designated as priority groups for Local Authorities to house except where there have diagnosed health issues including mental health. This does make it harder to find accommodation. In addition our SUs can have additional problems which result in added difficulties when it comes to finding landlords willing to accept them as tenants, including issues with drugs and alcohol. As part of our TTG service we have developed a module on how to be a good tenant, however at times there are difficulties delivering this widely in prisons due to difficulties accessing prisoners because of well documented staffing issues which can result in prisoners being confined to their cells.
- d) We inform the Local Authority homeless persons unit when a service user is being released with no accommodation. The Local Authority might see them on the day of release but they are not able to hold accommodation for an individual until that person is released due to the risk that the person may not turn up or may subsequently decide to stay with someone they know. This creates a problem guaranteeing there will be accommodation available to those who need it on release.
- e) One consequence of short term sentences, or following recall to prison, can be that individuals lose their accommodation and belongings. This can also affect their connections to their support network, affecting their ability to sofa surf until more permanent

accommodation can be found. Without accommodation service users are more likely to drop out of contact with probation services, leading to further recalls.

- f) Service Users are released on Fridays if their due date for release falls on a weekend. This means it is more difficult to find emergency accommodation when it is needed and can result in rough sleeping when there is no place available.
- g) Private landlords can be unwilling to accept individuals claiming Universal Credit due to the six to eight weeks lag before receiving a rent payment. Anecdotally, we hear suggestions they are also concerned about whether they will receive the rental payment at all as it goes directly to the individual, not the landlord.
- h) When Service Users become homeless they can then find it difficult to maintain their appearance as they struggle to find places to shower and clean clothes, compounding the problem of finding accommodation and leading to long periods of rough sleeping.

2. The effectiveness and availability of services including emergency accommodation

- a) Our OMs report an increase in the number of service users who are sleeping rough. Services vary across Wales. We are aware of emergency accommodation in Cardiff for example but other areas may have none. Where it does exist it may be seasonal and limited to the winter months. Availability is often on the basis of first come, first served, leaving some without a place.
- b) The temporary accommodation which is available may not be suitable, with service users unwilling to stay if they fear for their safety or there is a prevalence of drug use. This is particularly the case in some larger hostels.

3. The steps to prevent and tackle rough sleeping in Wales

- a) Each LA will have a single gateway for accommodation issues. In addition there are a number of joint agency meetings where issues of homelessness can be raised, including:
 - Safeguarding boards (children and adults) which are regional collaborative committees specifically focused on housing
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 - Supporting people: Regional collaborative committees
 - Public service boards

- b) Our OMs suggest rough sleeping could be reduced through:

- An increase in hostel accommodation so that there is wider availability across Wales and people are not released from prison with no available accommodation.
- More dispersed accommodation for SUs so that SUs are not grouped together in large hostels
- Greater availability of LA accommodation
- Increased availability of bond schemes. Universal Credit is a challenge for our SUs due to the potential delay in receiving a first payment. In addition many SUs have a limited ability to budget. Bond schemes, where a guarantor undertakes to pay the rent due to a landlord in the event the tenant does not meet the payment could help secure accommodation, particularly by opening up more private accommodation.
- Wider use of release on temporary licence for suitable candidates where accommodation is identified to avoid the additional risk of being immediately homeless when released on a Friday.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit evidence, and look forward to answering your questions on the 8th February.