

19<sup>th</sup> February 2019

## **Our vision**

Everyone in Wales should have a decent and affordable home: it is the foundation for the health and well-being of people and communities.

## **Mission**

Shelter Cymru's mission is to improve people's lives through our advice and support services and through training, education and information work. Through our policy, research, campaigning and lobbying, we will help overcome the barriers that stand in the way of people in Wales having a decent affordable home.

## **Values**

- Be independent and not compromised in any aspect of our work with people in housing need.
- Work as equals with people in housing need, respect their needs, and help them to take control of their lives.
- Constructively challenge to ensure people are properly assisted and to improve good practice.

## **Introduction**

Shelter Cymru welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence on the progress made towards implementing the Welsh Government's Rough Sleeping Action Plan. We welcome the aims of the plan and particularly the intention to end the need for people to sleep rough. We do have concerns that it is difficult to assess the progress made on the strategy as it is somewhat vague in parts and lacks tangible outcomes and actions. We feel that there is little evidence to suggest any of the actions have yet had a significant impact on the number of people of sleeping rough. In our experience the solutions being offered to people are broadly the same as those a year ago, with the exception of a small number of Housing First projects having been launched in the last year.

To successfully tackle rough sleeping there needs to be a shift away from traditional models and a leap towards rapid rehousing, flexible support and Housing First, with the principles of Housing First being embedded at every level of and type of accommodation. There is robust international evidence which shows that this is what

works. The emphasis needs to be on getting people into permanent homes with support as soon as possible, rather than pushing everybody through the hostel system.

In order to achieve this we strongly recommend a feasibility study of an All Wales Housing First programme to calculate the costs and benefits of implementing Housing First at scale. We also recognise the structural issues impacting on rough sleeping and urge the Welsh Government strategy to focus on increasing access to affordable, permanent homes and to support local authorities to focus on the structural barriers to housing as well the individual.

We welcome the focus on assertive outreach but stress that this is only appropriate if services are able to offer suitable and appropriate accommodation. To implement assertive outreach with only an offer of floor space, pod or emergency bed is unethical and unfair. We would call for an end to the use of floor space as we repeatedly hear that this is not what people want or need. Floor space should not in our view be described as 'accommodation'.

Our research found that people who are sleeping rough struggled to access housing advice and assistance. We heard of the difficulties they faced trying to make a homelessness application, gather and present evidence and follow their case through the system. As such we have established a new street advocacy service which aims to ensure people are able to navigate the system and get the help that they are legally entitled to.

We urge the Welsh Government to ensure that local authorities are listening to the views and experiences of people sleeping rough and the organisations that work with them and value and act upon these. We cannot end rough sleeping if we are not offering the right help, and we cannot know what is the right help if we do not listen to the people who need it.

Going forward we welcome the review of priority need, the consideration of devolving administrative powers over welfare reform and the affordable housing review, and hope that these pieces of work will lead to reductions in the numbers of people forced to sleep rough in Wales.