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Minister for Housing and Local Government
Welsh Government

Dyddiad | Date: 23 April 2019

Pwnc | Subject: Rough sleeping inquiry – follow-up evidence session on 21 March

Dear Minister,

The Committee would like to thank you and your officials for attending our meeting on 21 March 2019 to provide further evidence on the Welsh Government's progress in tackling rough sleeping.

The Committee welcomes your clear commitment in written evidence to "reducing and ultimately ending the need to sleep rough in Wales".

The Committee has two main concerns. First, that the Welsh Government has not shown sufficient sense of urgency in implementing the practical changes required to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness in Wales. Secondly, it is concerned that the Welsh Government has failed to put forward tangible, measurable targets.

We recognise that the Welsh Government's two-year [Rough Sleeping Action Plan](#) contained a laudable commitment to "reduce rough sleeping and end the need for people to sleep rough". However, over halfway through the implementation period and, according to Shelter, there is little evidence that the actions have had a significant impact on the number of rough sleepers in Wales. Though some progress has been made, the Committee feels that the pace of change is not sufficient.

As you stated in your oral evidence, there has not been a direct impact on the number of homeless people because the focus of the two-year action plan on rough sleeping is to provide training to front-line staff. While recognising the importance of such training, given that the plan has been in place for almost a year, the Committee is somewhat concerned that it has failed to result in a reduction in the number of homeless people.



Some key pieces of research and guidance are yet to be completed. Your paper states that there has been a delay in the publication of the revised code of guidance for local authorities on the Rough Sleeping Action Plan due to “uncertainty around immigration policy and eligibility regulations arising from the outcome of negotiations for exiting the EU”. The Committee appreciates your commitment to updating parts of the guidance that are not impacted by Brexit, but would like further clarity on how the Welsh Government intends to update the guidance and within what timeframe.

The Committee is also concerned by the lack of measurable targets, which is an issue that was raised by homeless charities and organisations in evidence to the inquiry. Shelter expressed concerns that the Rough Sleeping Action Plan lacks tangible actions and the Wallich is concerned by the lack of clarity regarding whether actions in the action plan have been completed.

As well as an absence of measurable targets and outcomes, it also lacks the ambition to set an overarching target to end rough sleeping in Wales. Crisis stated that the action plan should contain “an overarching target date by which Welsh Government would like to see an end to rough sleeping”.

In oral evidence, you stated that you cannot commit to eradicating homelessness by a specific date. However, the Committee would welcome a statement on the Welsh Government’s ultimate goal. In its Rough Sleeping Strategy, the UK Government made a commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to end it by 2027, and the Committee would like the Welsh Government to make a similar commitment.

Given the emphasis placed on revising, or abolishing entirely, the **priority need** categories during the Committee’s original inquiry, we are disappointed by the slow progress in developing an evidential basis for considering the issues. We would be grateful if you could provide clarity as to why the research on the implications of changing priority need is not expected to be published until April 2020 which is after the two-year Rough Sleeping Action Plan has come to an end.

Despite efforts undertaken to reduce the number of rough sleepers, the 2018 annual rough sleeping count’s 2-week estimate shows an increase of almost 1 per cent in the number of rough sleepers since 2017 and, more worryingly, an increase of 11 per cent since 2016.



However, these statistics are merely a snapshot of rough sleeping and do not provide a full picture of the situation across the country over a longer period of time. The delays in fully implementing the **Street Homelessness Information Network (SHIN)** project mean that there is a lack of in-depth data regarding rough sleeping throughout the year across Wales. The Committee was told by the previous Minister in February 2018 that the Government hoped that the SHIN project would be implemented within 12 to 18 months.

The Committee appreciates the need to ensure that this project is an effective means of collecting data, but feels that it is essential that the project is rolled out throughout Wales as soon as possible to collate robust data and to inform policy development. The Committee is disappointed that the roll-out of such an important resource has been delayed and would like clarity as to why the issues that you outlined have caused such a significant delay when the previous Minister indicated some data was expected by this point. While the Committee appreciates that there are issues around the number of partners involved and the sensitivity of personal information, it would also be helpful if you could provide a clearer indication regarding the timescale for the full roll-out of the SHIN project.

You stated that although you thought about 65 per cent of households threatened with homelessness are saved from homelessness, there has been an increase in the number of those facing the threat of homelessness, which you attributed to various factors such as universal credit and austerity measures. This is a matter of grave concern to us. The Committee would be grateful for further details as to the steps the Welsh Government can take to mitigate these factors.

The Committee has considerable concerns about **emergency accommodation**. The Wallich told us that a number of people are still sleeping rough in places where emergency accommodation is available. We appreciate that the reasons for this are complex: on the one hand, we were told that people do not wish to stay there because they are fearful that users are taking drugs but, on the other hand, we were told that some people are unable to use emergency accommodation because they cannot maintain habits in emergency accommodation. The Committee feels that there is a lack of meaningful progress, from the Welsh Government which means that a large number of beds in emergency accommodation remain unused.

The Committee welcomes the principle on which **Housing First** is based, whereby homeless people should be quickly moved into permanent accommodation and then



given assistance to address their support needs. However, the Committee is concerned that the Welsh Government has failed to set a clear target date for rolling the Housing First project out across Wales, as recommended by Shelter Cymru and Crisis. While the Committee appreciates that this process is intensive and expensive, and the importance of rolling it out to the right people in the right place, it regrets the insufficient pace in its implementation.

Following a series of pilots across Wales, the Committee notes the establishment of the 18-month Housing First trailblazer fund. While you confirmed that the evaluations will be used to calculate the costs and benefits of implementing Housing First across Wales, you did not provide a date by which this work will be completed. The Committee recognises the importance of establishing a firm evidence base for such projects, but this issue requires swifter action with a clearer deadline for rolling out the Housing First project, rather than further pilots.

The Committee is also concerned that the Welsh Government is yet to publish the good practice guide on the implementation of **local connection**, which was identified as an area of importance in our report a year ago. We were told this is due to be published after Easter and would like to have sight of this guidance as soon as it becomes available.

The Committee welcomes the additional £30 million of funding over 2018–19 and 2019–20 to tackle and prevent homelessness. In written evidence, you state that it is “too early” to expect this to lead to “significant changes in the rough sleeper data”. However, the Committee feels that the Government could provide a clearer steer on what aims it has for effecting change in the number of rough sleepers, by setting measurable targets within specific timelines.

In evidence, you referred to Wrexham community care hub as an example of good practice. You state that this model of service provision is being promoted to local authorities and local health boards, but the Committee would like to see more information on how this is being promoted.

I should be grateful if you would respond in due course.

Yours sincerely



John

John Griffiths

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

