

Life on the streets: preventing and tackling rough sleeping in Wales

April 2018



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April 2018



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016 to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising expenditure, administration and policy matters encompassing (but not restricted to): local government; housing, community regeneration, cohesion and safety; tackling poverty; equality of opportunity and human rights.

Committee Chair:



John Griffiths AM

Welsh Labour
Newport East

Current Committee membership:



Gareth Bennett AM

UKIP Wales
South Wales Central



Janet Finch-Saunders AM

Welsh Conservatives
Aberconwy



Siân Gwenllïan AM

Plaid Cymru
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Rhianon Passmore AM

Welsh Labour
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Jenny Rathbone AM

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Cardiff Central



Jack Sargeant AM

Welsh Labour
Alyn and Deeside



Bethan Sayed AM

Plaid Cymru
South Wales West

The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry



Mick Antoniw AM

Welsh Labour
Pontypridd

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Chair's Foreword

It is difficult, if not impossible, for most of us to imagine bedding down on the street at night; waking up on a cold pavement, with little more to shelter us from the elements than a sleeping bag or blanket. But that is the harsh reality for hundreds of people in Wales, with all the suffering, risks and dangers involved. This is an indictment of the way we organise and conduct ourselves as a society, country and state. It should not be a twenty first century reality in the UK – the sixth biggest economy in the world.

The latest official statistics show an upward trend in the level of rough sleeping, with an estimate of over 300 people living on the streets at the end of 2017. With the UK Government's continuing cuts to funding for Wales, and the full impact of welfare reform yet to hit, it is easy to see why there is growing concern that this trend is set to continue. Against this background, we decided to undertake a short, focused inquiry examining the reasons why people end up on the streets and how government and service providers can do more and be more effective in preventing and dealing with rough sleeping.

When we agreed to undertake this work, we did not foresee the harsh weather conditions that have hit many parts of Wales over the past few months. For those of us with a roof over our head, the snow and freezing temperatures may have been no more than an inconvenience. But for those who sleep rough, these treacherous conditions would have been a real threat to their safety and well-being, and in some cases to their lives. The severe weather brought the perils into sharp focus but our concern must not be confined to the winter months. Shockingly, the life expectancy of a rough sleeper is 47 years, and for many of those, living on the streets is an existence, not a life.

The increasingly familiar sight of rough sleepers in our communities may evoke sympathy and compassion, unease or, in some cases, suspicion and hostility. Many questions come to mind. What led them to be sleeping on the streets? Why are they there when there are places they could stay? What is being done by the authorities to help them, and how hard can it really be to stop them needing to sleep rough? These are some of the questions we posed as part of our inquiry.

We heard from a range of organisations who support rough sleepers and from experts who have completed extensive research in this subject area. Perhaps more importantly, we heard from people who have first-hand experience of life on the streets but have since been supported into accommodation. They gave moving accounts of how they ended up sleeping rough. Many included a catalogue of

events that even the most resilient among us would struggle to endure. They told of the despair associated with such a life, the monotony of having nowhere to go and nothing to do, and of the daily struggle to survive. One young man recalled how he would wait the night to come just so that he could bed down and find temporary relief from his grim reality.

We thank all of those who shared their experiences with us so candidly and wish them well for the future. We would also like to thank the staff and support workers we met during our inquiry. We were struck by their dedication, compassion and positivity. Staff members told us that they “never give up” on their residents, despite some having been through their doors many times before. It is this perseverance, this “stickability”, that we heard is crucial. It is something that must permeate through the Government to frontline staff, if Wales is to succeed in ending the need for people to sleep rough.

When we began our work, the Welsh Government’s *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* had not been published, therefore it did not form part of our terms of reference. Although we did not have an opportunity to undertake a detailed assessment of the Plan, we welcome it as a positive development, with the potential to bring about change if it is fully resourced and implemented effectively. Indeed, many of the actions seek to address the concerns raised in the evidence we received. However, there are a number of areas where further, and in some cases more immediate, steps are required, and we have made a series of recommendations to this effect. We look forward to a positive response from the Welsh Government to our report and recommendations.

John Griffiths AM

Committee Chair, Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Government:

- immediately strengthens the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities in the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness to set out a clear expectation that rough sleepers should be determined as in priority need for accommodation under current legislation;
- brings forward an Order under section 72 of the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* to specify that “rough sleepers” have priority need for accommodation as the first step in a phased approach to abolishing priority need entirely; and
- works with local authorities and the homelessness sector to develop an appropriate and sufficiently robust process for verifying rough sleepers for the purpose of assessing priority need for accommodation. Page 25

Janet Finch-Saunders AM did not support the above recommendation.

Recommendation 2. We recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the Welsh Government undertakes work on the implications for local authorities and the housing and homelessness sector of abolishing priority need. This should include an assessment of the financial implications for authorities as well as any potential increase in demand for temporary accommodation. The outcome of this work should be used to establish a detailed timetable for abolition, to inform future funding decisions, and to plan and commission services..... Page 25

Recommendation 3. If the Welsh Government is not minded to accept our recommendation of a phased approach to abolishing priority need (Recommendation 1) we recommend that it:

- amends the definition of “vulnerable” in section 71 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to reflect current case law (the *Hotak* judgment), and
- amends that Act to include a power for the Welsh Ministers to further amend the definition of “vulnerable” by Order, subject to the affirmative procedure.Page 26

Recommendation 4. We recommend that the Welsh Government re-establishes the Prisoner, Accommodation and Resettlement Working Group. The aim of the group should be to foster stronger working relationships and collaboration between all relevant parties and to secure a continued commitment to the effective implementation of the National Pathway. We also recommend that the Welsh Government uses this Working Group to improve homelessness support services for prisoners serving short sentences. Page 26

Recommendation 5. If the Welsh Government is not minded to accept our recommendation of a phased approach to abolishing priority need (Recommendation 1), we recommend that it reinstates automatic priority need for accommodation for prison leavers. Page 27

Janet Finch-Saunders AM did not support the above recommendation.

Recommendation 6. We recommend the Welsh Government considers alternative funding arrangements to ensure that the financial consequences of rough sleeping are shared more equally between the authority where the applicant has a local connection and the authority providing homelessness support services (where there is no local connection). Page 27

Recommendation 7. We recommend that the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities in the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness sets out clearly the steps that should be taken by local authorities to ensure that suitable support is available to rough sleepers in a receiving authority ahead of any reconnection. Page 28

Recommendation 8. We recommend that the Welsh Government monitors local authorities' use of local connection and reconnection services and the outcome for rough sleepers. The outcomes recorded and monitored should be those beyond the fact that an applicant has been reconnected. Page 28

Recommendation 9. We recommend that the Welsh Government ensures that relevant third sector organisations and local authorities fully engage with the SHIN project. Page 32

Recommendation 10. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers seeking powers over the administration of Universal Credit akin to those available to the Scottish Government. Page 40

Janet Finch-Saunders AM did not support the above recommendation.

Recommendation 11. We recommend that the Welsh Government works with local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to establish the reasons for the comparatively low level of social housing allocations to homeless households. Following this, the Welsh Government should set out the steps it intends to take to maximise the number of homeless households who are allocated social housing..... Page 40

Recommendation 12. We recommend that the Welsh Government sets out more clearly in its *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* the steps it intends to take to improve access to the Private Rented Sector for rough sleepers, including details of incentives for private landlords. We recommend that the Welsh Government monitors and reports back to the Committee on the outcome of this work. Page 41

Recommendation 13. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers the lessons that can be learnt from the Step-by-Step project in Rhondda Cynon Taff, with a view to rolling out similar projects across Wales..... Page 41

Recommendation 14. We recommend that the Welsh Government provides further detail in its *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* on how it intends to work with local authorities and their partners to improve move-on from emergency accommodation.....Page 49

Recommendation 15. We recommend that the Rough Sleeping Action Plan sets out more clearly:

- who will be responsible for taking forward each action, and
- the outcomes expected against actions, and how these will be measured and monitored (beyond the quarterly reporting arrangements referred to in the Plan).Page 61

Recommendation 16. We recommend that quarterly reports on the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* should be published on the Welsh Government's website. Page 61

Recommendation 17. We recommend that responsibility for the implementation of the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* should be shared jointly between the Minister for Housing and Regeneration and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services.....Page 62

Recommendation 18. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers revising its *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* to include further preventative actions that can be taken forward to end rough sleeping in Wales including clear links to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. These actions should be informed by the international evidence base and should have regard to the causes of, and risk factors associated with, rough sleeping.Page 63

Recommendation 19. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers strengthening the *Housing First – National Principles and Guidance for Wales* to set out an expectation that local authorities should offer Housing First as a default approach to rough sleepers.....Page 63

Recommendation 20. We recommend that the Welsh Government undertakes an analysis of the “congregate” and “dispersed” Housing First models, drawing on the international evidence base, including that set out in *Crisis’ Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review*, with a view to assessing whether both models are suitable housing solutions for rough sleepers in Wales.Page 64

Recommendation 21. We recommend that the Welsh Government works with its partners to identify best practice models to deliver assertive outreach support and to reflect this in the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness.....Page 65

Recommendation 22. We recommend that the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* sets out an expectation on local authorities and their partners that assertive outreach services should be developed and delivered in tandem with Housing First.....Page 65

Recommendation 23. We recommend that the Welsh Government:

- sets out clear expectations that local authority enforcement officers should take part in the PATH training programme; and
- encourages the police service in Wales to engage with the PATH training programme, and to facilitate the uptake of the programme for Police Community Support Officers. Page 66

Recommendation 24. We recommend that the Welsh Government makes representations to the Police and Crime Commissioners in Wales with a view to encouraging all police forces in Wales to ensure that officers make use of body worn cameras when interacting with rough sleepers.....Page 66

Recommendation 25. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers undertaking work to assess the merits of diverted giving schemes and to identify best practice in this area. This should inform any public campaign by the Government to harness support for rough sleepers.Page 68

Recommendation 26. We recommend that the Welsh Government sets out clear expectations that any diverted giving schemes should be motivated by the need to support rough sleepers and be developed in full consultation with the homelessness sector.....Page 68

Recommendation 27. We recommend that the Welsh Government, as a matter of urgency, sets a timeline for:

- publishing the findings of its Flexible Funding Pathfinders, and
- its decision on the proposal to merge the Supporting People Programme Grant with other housing and non-housing related grants.

This timeline should take account of the forthcoming devolution of the housing element of short-term supported housing funding to Wales. Page 72

Recommendation 28. If the findings of the Flexible Funding Pathfinders show a reduction in funding for the Supported People Programme, or cast doubt on the sector’s ability to maintain service delivery at existing levels, we recommend that the Supporting People Programme Grant should remain a separate, ring-fenced grant..... Page 73

Recommendation 29. We recommend that the Welsh Government provides further assurances that the Rough Sleeping Action Plan will be adequately resourced, that cross-government funding will be made available, and that funding to ensure the effective implementation of the Plan will be kept under review..... Page 73

1. Introduction

1. In December 2017, the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee (the Committee) agreed to undertake a short inquiry into rough sleeping in Wales.

2. In January 2018, the Committee agreed the following terms of reference:

To consider –

- the effectiveness of Part 2 of the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* in preventing rough sleeping;
- the scale of rough sleeping in Wales and the adequacy of data;
- the causes of rough sleeping and the apparent recent increase in rough sleeping;
- the effectiveness and availability of services, including emergency accommodation; and
- the steps to prevent and tackle rough sleeping in Wales.

3. The Committee issued a press release and published details of its inquiry on the Assembly's website. It received 22 written submissions and held six oral evidence sessions with stakeholders and the Minister for Housing and Regeneration. The Committee also met with staff and residents at two projects that provide housing and non-housing support for rough sleepers: the Tŷ Gobaith Lifehouse in Cardiff, run by the Salvation Army, and Solas Cymru's supported housing scheme, Clarence Place in Newport.

4. Further details of the evidence received along with notes from the project visits are at the end of the report.

2. Effectiveness of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

5. Part 2 of the ***Housing (Wales) Act 2014*** (the 2014 Act) introduced a new approach to tackling homelessness based on early intervention and prevention, designed to help everyone at risk of homelessness rather than just those in priority groups.
6. In March 2016, the Welsh Government updated its ***Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness*** (the Code of Guidance). Local authorities must have regard to the Code of Guidance when exercising their functions under Part 2 of the 2014 Act.
7. A Welsh Government evaluation of Part 2 of the 2014 Act is underway, and an ***interim report*** was published in August 2017. The final evaluation is due to be published in spring or summer 2018.

Evidence from respondents

8. There was broad consensus among respondents that the 2014 Act has had a positive impact on homelessness. However, the majority of respondents, including The Wallich, The Salvation Army, Huggard, Cymorth Cymru and Shelter Cymru highlighted that the 2014 Act has had limited impact on those who are already homeless, in particular rough sleepers.¹
9. Dr Peter Mackie, Cardiff University stated:

“[the 2014 Act has] had a very positive impact on prevention and alleviation with the broader homeless population...But, actually, with rough-sleepers, arguably the most vulnerable group of homeless people, it’s not been overly effective.”²

2.1. The need for a more proactive approach

10. Dr Mackie believed that “a key deficiency” of the 2014 Act was that it only requires local authorities to assist those who actively seek assistance. He stated:

¹ Written evidence, RS03, RS15, RS04, RS13 and RS06

² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings (RoP), para 3, 8 February 2018 (NB: unless otherwise stated, subsequent references in this report to “RoP” refer to the proceedings of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee)

“...many rough sleepers and people at risk of rough sleeping will not seek out services. Local authorities need to proactively identify and assist people at risk of rough sleeping and those who are already rough sleeping.”³

2. 2. Failure to co-operate

11. The 2014 Act provides that a local authority can end its homelessness duties towards an applicant if it is “satisfied that the applicant is unreasonably failing to co-operate with the authority”.

12. The Wallich raised concern about the use of the above provision and stated:

“I’d possibly question whether these people have not co-operated or whether the way that the advice and assistance has been offered hasn’t met that individual’s needs. So, when people do approach housing options with complex needs, I think there needs to be a very person-centred approach to make sure that those needs are met and the right advice and assistance is offered in a way that they can access it.”⁴

13. Similarly, Crisis’ report, ***The Homelessness Monitor: Wales 2017***, highlighted particular concerns about cases which fall out of the system specifically due to ‘non-cooperation’, which was “a key innovation in the [2014 Act]”.

2. 3. Duty to provide interim accommodation and to secure accommodation

14. Crisis pointed out that the 2014 Act “gives no right to housing for rough sleepers besides the requirement for local authorities to take ‘reasonable steps to help secure accommodation’”. This has “proven to limit any positive impacts on rough sleepers”.⁵

2. 4. Priority need

15. Sleeping rough, in itself, does not provide automatic priority need status. However, the Welsh Government’s Code of Guidance notes that rough sleepers are likely to be vulnerable for some “other special reason” due to the health and social implications of their situation.

³ Written evidence, RS11

⁴ RoP, para 344, 8 February 2018

⁵ Written evidence, RS07

- 16.** There were differing views among respondents about whether rough sleepers were likely to be given priority need status.
- 17.** According to the WLGA, “many rough sleepers will be classed as priority need and will be offered temporary accommodation by the local authority”.⁶ Powys Council and Wrexham Council expressed similar views.⁷
- 18.** In contrast, other respondents, including Cardiff Council,⁸ Dr Mackie⁹ and representatives from the third sector reported that, in practice, rough sleepers were unlikely to be found in priority need.
- 19.** Shelter Cymru explained that, in line with the Code of Guidance, most rough sleepers should be treated as priority need. However, it asserted that this is not the case and that participants in its research “frequently mentioned lack of priority need as a key reason why they were street homeless”.¹⁰
- 20.** Shelter Cymru welcomed the commitment by the Welsh Government in its ***Rough Sleeping Action Plan*** “to consider the case for modifying priority need groups by 2020”. However, it believed that “more urgent action is needed” and suggested that, in the meantime, changes should be made to the Code of Guidance “to improve consistency around priority need decisions”.¹¹
- 21.** Cymorth Cymru suggested that using the Pereira Test as a basis for assessing whether an application is “vulnerable” (as set out in the 2014 Act) was particularly problematic. It raised concern that the meaning of “vulnerable” was not being interpreted consistently across authorities.¹² The Wallich expressed similar views and called for the Code of Guidance to be revised.¹³
- 22.** Pobl Group believed that the 2014 Act should be amended to include rough sleepers as a distinct category of priority need.¹⁴
- 23.** Some respondents, including Shelter Cymru, Dr Mackie and Professor Fitzpatrick were strongly in favour of abolishing priority need. Professor Fitzpatrick

⁶ Written evidence, RS01

⁷ RoP, para 194 and 196, 8 February 2018

⁸ RoP, para 193, 8 February 2018

⁹ Written evidence, RS11

¹⁰ Written evidence, RS06

¹¹ Written evidence, RS06A

¹² Written evidence, RS13

¹³ Written evidence, RS03

¹⁴ Written evidence, RS19

acknowledged that in Scotland this had led to a trebling of the use of temporary accommodation, which was “problematic”. Despite this, she reported that there remained a strong consensus in Scotland across all sectors that abolishing priority need had been “the right thing to do”.¹⁵

24. She suggested that the preventative approach to homelessness adopted in Wales could help mitigate any significant increase in the use of temporary accommodation.¹⁶ A similar view was expressed by Crisis.¹⁷

25. While Professor Fitzpatrick acknowledged the unmet housing need across Wales, she emphasised that the estimated number of rough of sleepers was relatively low. As such, meeting their housing needs would not mean “a massive displacement in terms of other groups”.¹⁸

26. Service provider representatives, while not opposed in principle to abolishing priority need, suggested that this should be a longer term goal and should follow an impact assessment. The Wallich stated:

“The reality of getting rid of priority need needs a lot of work to make the situation workable. I think if we did it straight off, we would be in dire straits.”¹⁹

27. Huggard and The Salvation Army echoed the above view.²⁰

28. Local government representatives highlighted the financial implications for authorities associated with abolishing priority need. Powys Council reported that there would be a “significant increase in expenditure on homelessness services”.²¹

29. Cardiff Council raised concern that, if priority need is abolished, it may “increase the numbers of [homeless applicants] coming forward rather than people trying to solve their own problems”.²²

¹⁵ RoP, para 36, 8 February 2018

¹⁶ RoP, para 37, 8 February 2018

¹⁷ RoP, para 473, 8 February 2018

¹⁸ RoP, para 41, 8 February 2018

¹⁹ RoP, para 352, 8 February 2018

²⁰ RoP, para 353 and 354, 8 February 2018

²¹ RoP, para 217, 8 February 2018

²² RoP, para 220, 8 February 2018

2. 5. Prison leavers

30. The 2014 Act removed automatic priority need status for prison leavers. Instead, it provides that prison leavers are only in priority need if they have a “local connection” to the area and are “vulnerable” as a result of their detention.

31. As part of the work leading up to the 2014 Act, and in light of concerns about the potential impact of removing automatic priority need status for prison leavers, the Welsh Government established the Prisoner, Accommodation and Resettlement Working Group. As a result of the Group’s work, the Welsh Government published the ***National Pathway for Homelessness Services for Children, Young People and Adults in the Secure Estate*** (the National Pathway) in December 2015.

32. Many respondents, including service providers, Shelter Cymru and Cymorth Cymru, raised concern about the impact of removing automatic priority need status for prison leavers on rough sleeping.²³

33. Cymorth Cymru stated:

“...the change to the priority need category regarding offenders has affected access to housing for this group. Although research about the impact of this is still being developed, we have anecdotal evidence from people who have been homeless that this change to priority need has reduced their ability to secure accommodation, which has in turn had a negative impact on their wellbeing and has increased the likelihood of re-offending.”²⁴

34. Shelter Cymru raised similar points and highlighted a reluctance among some prison leavers to approach local authorities for assistance knowing that they no longer had automatic priority need status.²⁵

35. The Wales Community Rehabilitation Company provided anecdotal evidence of prison leavers whom it considered were in priority need, that were subsequently not assessed as such by the local authority. For example, a female prison leaver at risk of domestic violence.²⁶

²³ Written evidence, RS06 and RS13

²⁴ Written evidence, RS13

²⁵ RoP, para 516, 8 February 2018

²⁶ RoP, para 708, 8 February 2018

36. More generally, Shelter Cymru reported that “some local authorities have de-prioritised prison leavers” and that they are therefore “left at the bottom of the pile”.²⁷

37. There was general consensus among those who commented on the Welsh Government’s National Pathway²⁸ that it had been a positive development. However, a number of respondents, including the WLGA²⁹ and local authority representatives,³⁰ Shelter Cymru³¹ and Cymorth Cymru raised concern that the National Pathway was not being fully implemented. As a result, Cymorth Cymru had “serious concerns about whether [the National Pathway] has managed to counteract the negative impact of changes to priority need [for prison leavers]”.³²

38. Local authority representatives pointed out that under the National Pathway authorities should be given 12 weeks’ notice that a prisoner will be homeless on release. However, in practice, authorities often receive little or no notice, which provides them with limited time to help put accommodation in place.³³ In response to the above concerns, the National Probation Service and the Wales Community Rehabilitation Company explained that some prisoners will be serving short sentences and that prisoners’ circumstances can often change unexpectedly ahead of, or following, release.³⁴

39. Cymorth Cymru cited “changes to probation services” and under-resourcing of the Probation Service by the UK Government as barriers to the effective implementation of the Pathway.³⁵ Similar points were made by Shelter Cymru³⁶ and the WLGA.³⁷

40. A few respondents, including Cymorth Cymru³⁸ and the Wales Community Rehabilitation Company,³⁹ suggested that the Welsh Government should consider

²⁷ RoP, para 531, 8 February 2018

²⁸ ***National Pathway for Homelessness Services for Children, Young People and Adults in the Secure Estate***, December 2015

²⁹ Written evidence, RS01

³⁰ RoP, para 272, 275 and 277, 8 February 2018

³¹ RoP, para 529, 8 February 2018

³² Written evidence, RS13

³³ RoP, para 272, 275 and 277, 8 February 2018

³⁴ RoP, para 649 and 651, 8 February 2018

³⁵ RoP, para 467, 8 February 2018

³⁶ RoP, para 529, 8 February 2018

³⁷ Written evidence, RS01

³⁸ Written evidence, RS13

³⁹ Written evidence, RS10A

reinstating automatic priority need for prison leavers. While Dr Mackie believed that it should be reinstated as soon as possible.⁴⁰

2. 6. Local connection and reconnection services

41. Some respondents reported that reconnection services were working well and had provided positive outcomes. Others raised concern that these services were being used inappropriately for rough sleepers, with individuals being reconnected with no suitable support in place in the receiving authority.

42. According to Shelter Cymru, “there is evidence that in some areas local connection decisions are...problematic as they are being used inconsistently and in some cases unfairly and without proper assessments”.⁴¹ The Wallich reported that, in one particular area, rough sleepers with no local connection are “far less likely” to receive appropriate support.⁴²

43. In commenting on what he believed to be inappropriate use of local connection, Dr Mackie stated:

“...the [2014 Act] says quite clearly, ‘We should be working with you on an individual basis to look at solutions.’ That should absolutely include the solutions—or that should be about the Cardiff housing market. ‘Can I get you into a private rented flat in Cardiff?’ should be one of those options. That’s what the law tells us, and that’s not entirely what’s happening. What’s happening is we’re exploring how we can reconnect you back. Now, if Welsh Government or the National Assembly wishes to have a different approach, that we should be reconnecting people back, then the law needs to be changed for the practices that are going on, particularly in Cardiff, to be legitimised.”⁴³

44. Dr Mackie referred to Crisis’ ***Ending rough sleeping: what works, An international evidence review***, which also raised concerns about reconnection policies, including the policy in place in Cardiff:

“Reconnecting an individual with positive social networks outside of the area where they seek help can be a very positive response but where a reconnection is a single offer, support in the receiving authority is hardly explored, and alternatives within the local authority are not considered,

⁴⁰ RoP, para 79, 8 February 2018

⁴¹ Written evidence, RS06

⁴² Written evidence, RS03

⁴³ RoP, 131, 8 February 2018

this response can be highly problematic. In Welsh local authorities some rough sleepers are choosing to remain homeless and unsupported, rather than reconnecting to another authority.”

45. Similar concerns were raised by Llamau. It reported that, in some cases, rough sleepers had simply been given bus or train tickets to another area.⁴⁴

46. Cardiff Council reported that over 25% of rough sleepers in the city had no local connection and had come to the area “because of a lack of provision in other authorities”.⁴⁵ However, Dr Mackie questioned this on the basis of his research, which had found “very few [people] were attracted [to the area] by the services; they were attracted by a multiple of other far less significant but apparently meaningful reasons”.⁴⁶

47. Cardiff Council explained how its reconnection service operated and stated that it “supports rough sleepers with no local connection to return to their home authority in a managed way, or achieve another positive accommodation outcome”.⁴⁷ The Salvation Army, which runs the reconnection service with Cardiff Council, stated that very few people are reconnected out of Cardiff. All those that had been reconnected have had a meaningful link with the receiving authority.⁴⁸

48. Dr Mackie suggested alternative funding arrangements could be put in place to meet the cost of the provision of homelessness services when a person with a local connection to one authority remains in an authority where there is no local connection.⁴⁹ On a similar note, Llamau suggested that consideration should be given to funding levels in authorities who delivering homelessness services to people with no local connection.⁵⁰

Evidence from the Minister

49. The Minister stated that the 2014 Act “has been widely acclaimed for its success in changing the focus of local authority homelessness services to prevention rather than relief”.⁵¹ However, she acknowledged that there is “a long way to go in terms of making sure that our legislation delivers specifically for

⁴⁴ RoP, para 450, 8 February 2018

⁴⁵ Written evidence, RS02

⁴⁶ RoP, para 132, 8 February 2018

⁴⁷ Written evidence, RS02

⁴⁸ RoP, para 454, 8 February 2018

⁴⁹ RoP, para 131-132 and Written evidence, RS11A

⁵⁰ RoP, para 450, 8 February 2018

⁵¹ Written evidence, RS20

people who are rough-sleeping”. She suggested that stronger statutory guidance under the 2014 Act may be a way of facilitating this.⁵²

50. The Minister explained that the final evaluation of the 2014 Act is being undertaken by the University of Salford and that the findings will be published in spring or summer 2018. She also explained that she would consider whether any changes to legislation are required to tackle rough sleeping in light of those findings.⁵³

51. The Minister acknowledged that rough sleeping is not currently a priority need category. However, she pointed out that the Code of Guidance “advises authorities to consider chronic rough sleepers with multiple needs as vulnerable under the legislation, and therefore in priority need”.⁵⁴ The Minister explained that the Welsh Government will be looking specifically at the Code of Guidance as part of the evaluation of the 2014 Act.⁵⁵

52. The Minister explained that the abolition of priority need is a “significant decision...and would need to be made on the basis of an understanding of the evidence available”. She emphasised that no such decision will be made in relation to priority need until the findings of ongoing work in this area have been considered.⁵⁶

53. On the issue of prison leavers, the Minister explained that certain improvements could be made without the need for legislative or policy changes. For example, improving discussions with Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service.⁵⁷

54. The Minister’s official acknowledged that the National Pathway is not being “consistently or widely well implemented”, but that “building relationships and building a good dialogue” between the prison service and local authority housing officers will help to address this.⁵⁸

55. On the issue of local connection and reconnection services, the Minister’s official explained that, under the 2014 Act, local authorities are not required to consider local connection. However, he went on to state:

⁵² RoP, para 4, 14 February 2018

⁵³ RoP, para 5 and 7, 14 February 2018

⁵⁴ Written evidence, RS20

⁵⁵ RoP, para 49, 14 February 2018

⁵⁶ RoP, para 11-12, 14 February 2018

⁵⁷ RoP, para 15, 14 February 2018

⁵⁸ RoP, para 17 and 25, 14 February 2018

“If, as part of that conversation, [the applicant’s] options are limited due to, maybe, local service provision being limited, from a local point of view, to only local people, which is a decision that has been made locally by the local authority, not in respect of the Act, [the applicant’s] options may be considered very limited to stay in this area that [they are] not from. There may be a conversation that would take place in terms of: ‘We can help you to reconnect back to your home authority, and we’ll put things in place to make sure you’re not left high and dry on a bus with nowhere to go’.”⁵⁹

Our view

56. Part 2 of the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014*, with its focus firmly on the prevention of homelessness and early intervention, is clearly well-regarded both within Wales and beyond. Indeed, the *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017* in England introduces prevention and relief duties on English local authorities similar to those placed on Welsh authorities by the 2014 Act.

57. While the 2014 Act is still in its infancy, and the post-implementation evaluation is yet to be completed, we heard from respondents that early indications provide a positive picture, particularly in relation to homelessness prevention. However, looking more specifically at the impact of the Act on rough sleeping, a very different picture emerges. Given the reported success of the prevention duties, it is entirely possible that there have been some individuals who have been spared from sleeping rough as a result of the Act. Even so, we received strong evidence that the Act has fallen considerably short in assisting rough sleepers, who are among the most vulnerable in our communities. This is something that the Welsh Government’s latest Rough Sleeper Count, which shows a growing level of rough sleeping, seemingly confirms.

58. While the Act provided for a more progressive approach to ending homelessness it retains some of the key elements of the *Housing Act 1996*, including priority need and local connection. It is these provisions, and the way in which they are being implemented, that respondents highlighted as particularly problematic in the context of tackling rough sleeping.

59. In this chapter, we outline the case for making changes to the current priority need provisions. Our key recommendation (Recommendation 1) is to introduce a phased approach to abolishing priority need. This approach involves the extension

⁵⁹ RoP, para 104, 14 February 2018

of priority need to include rough sleepers as a separate category ahead of abolition.

60. While abolition of priority need is our clear preference, we make a number of further recommendations (Recommendations 3 and 5) aimed at improving the current priority need provisions with a view to strengthening the entitlements of rough sleepers and to tackling rough sleeping. We expect the Government to accept these recommendations if it is not minded to bring an end to priority need.

Priority need

61. The use of priority need continues to be the subject of much debate. It is understandable then that some respondents took this opportunity to comment more broadly on priority need, to reinforce their long-held views that it should be abolished.

62. We note that the Welsh Government has recently supported a motion calling on the Government to consider abolishing priority need and replacing it with a duty to provide an offer of suitable accommodation for all homeless people.⁶⁰ While this is a step in the right direction, we do not believe that it goes far enough. We heard from the Minister about a range of on-going and planned studies, the outcome of which will be used to inform any future decision on abolition. While we acknowledge that such a decision should be evidence based, we consider that the case has already been made.

63. We believe that the immeasurable human cost of homelessness, as well as the high cost associated with recurrent or sustained homelessness, provide strong arguments for abolishing priority need. Further, we heard about the importance of a rights-based approach to housing, where all those experiencing homelessness are entitled to housing, without having to demonstrate that they are in greater need than their counterparts. The abolition of priority need is central to this.

64. We recognise the concerns raised by some respondents about the financial implications for local authorities of abolishing priority need. Given this, we believe that a phased approach to abolition provides the most pragmatic way forward. For example, by introducing new categories of priority need, such as rough sleepers, and by amending existing categories. This approach should take account of the ability of authorities and the housing and homelessness sector to effectively manage the change.

⁶⁰ RoP, 10 January 2018

65. We believe that the focus on homelessness prevention within the Act provides a firm foundation on which to abolish priority need in Wales. We consider that the success of the prevention duties should help minimise the risk of any significant increase in demand for temporary accommodation as was seen following abolition in Scotland.

66. We note that the Welsh Government has committed to considering the case for modifying priority need groups by January 2020. We do not believe that this is a strong enough response or an ambitious enough target date, given the growing level of rough sleeping in Wales. Indeed, we are concerned that unless more decisive and immediate action is taken, the number of people forced to sleep rough will continue to rise.

67. We heard conflicting evidence about the likelihood of rough sleepers being found to be in priority need under the existing categories set out in the Act. While the Code of Guidance accompanying the Act clearly states that they are likely to be “vulnerable” (and should therefore be given priority status), we are concerned that, in practice, this is not the case. Given this, we do not believe that the existing categories provide sufficient protection. Nor do we believe that these categories should be relied upon to ensure that rough sleepers are afforded priority need status.

68. As was highlighted in evidence to us, it is difficult to identify a group of people in greater need of accommodation than those who sleep on the streets. To this end, we believe that a distinct category for verified rough sleepers is required. This will ensure that they are all owed the full housing duties under the Act, including, if necessary, the duty to secure accommodation.

69. While we acknowledge the Minister’s view that there may be challenges in verifying rough sleepers, we do not believe that these are insurmountable or that this is a sufficient reason not to take action.

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Government:

- immediately strengthens the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities in the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness to set out a clear expectation that rough sleepers should be determined as in priority need for accommodation under current legislation;
- brings forward an Order under section 72 of the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* to specify that “rough sleepers” have priority need for accommodation as the first step in a phased approach to abolishing priority need entirely; and

- works with local authorities and the homelessness sector to develop an appropriate and sufficiently robust process for verifying rough sleepers for the purpose of assessing priority need for accommodation.

Janet Finch-Saunders AM did not support the above recommendation.

Recommendation 2. We recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the Welsh Government undertakes work on the implications for local authorities and the housing and homelessness sector of abolishing priority need. This should include an assessment of the financial implications for authorities as well as any potential increase in demand for temporary accommodation. The outcome of this work should be used to establish a detailed timetable for abolition, to inform future funding decisions, and to plan and commission services.

Meaning of “vulnerable”

70. Notwithstanding the above recommendations, we are concerned that the current definition of “vulnerable” in the Act has failed to achieve the original intention, which was to ensure consistent interpretation of the term, and consistent decisions on priority need, across local authorities. While the Code of Guidance provides detailed advice on determining “vulnerability”, we heard evidence that called into question the extent to which authorities are having regard to the Code.

71. Further to this, we note that a 2015 Supreme Court judgment (*Hotak, Johnson and Kanu v London Borough of Southwark & Anor*), overturned the Pereira test for vulnerable homeless people. It is this test which forms the basis of the definition of “vulnerable” in the Act. The *Hotak* judgment applies in England and changes the comparator used when assessing “vulnerability”, from that of an “ordinary homeless person” (as under the Act) to “an ordinary person if made homeless, not with an ordinary actual homeless person”.

72. We are concerned that the effect of this is that the threshold for the purpose of assessing “vulnerability” is now higher in Wales than in England. If the current definition of “vulnerable” is retained within the Act, it is possible that the most vulnerable in Wales will be in a weaker position than their English counterparts. This does not sit comfortably, in our view, with the Welsh Government’s commitment to social justice, with its progressive approach to ending homelessness, or with its aim of tackling rough sleeping.

Recommendation 3. If the Welsh Government is not minded to accept our recommendation of a phased approach to abolishing priority need (Recommendation 1) we recommend that it:

- amends the definition of “vulnerable” in section 71 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to reflect current case law (the *Hotak* judgment), and
- amends that Act to include a power for the Welsh Ministers to further amend the definition of “vulnerable” by Order, subject to the affirmative procedure.

Prison leavers

73. We are concerned about the impact of the removal of automatic priority need status for prison leavers on rough sleeping. We heard evidence that the removal of this status has led to an increasing number of individuals being forced to sleep rough on release from prison. Several organisations predicted this outcome at the time of the Housing (Wales) Bill, and the Welsh Government developed the National Pathway to mitigate this.

74. While we believe that the National Pathway was a positive development and was well-intentioned, it is clear that further work is needed to ensure that it meets the particular needs of prison leavers who are likely to be homeless or who are at risk of homelessness on release.

75. We heard about some fundamental challenges which threaten the effective implementation of the National Pathway. The success of the Pathway relies on commitment from both devolved and non-devolved bodies. Without this commitment, and against a backdrop of limited resources within HM Prison and Probation Service, we are concerned that implementation of the Pathway will be patchy at best. At worst, the Pathway will be rendered entirely ineffective.

76. We are concerned that there are clear weaknesses in the process for identifying and supporting prisoners serving short-term sentences who are likely to be homeless or at risk of homelessness on release. These weaknesses need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. We understand that the Welsh Government has undertaken a review of the National Pathway and that the findings will be published imminently. We hope that these findings will be used to identify improvements to homelessness support services provided to short stay prisoners.

Recommendation 4. We recommend that the Welsh Government re-establishes the Prisoner, Accommodation and Resettlement Working Group. The aim of the group should be to foster stronger working relationships and collaboration between all relevant parties and to secure a continued commitment to the effective implementation of the National Pathway. We also recommend that the Welsh Government uses this Working Group to improve homelessness support services for prisoners serving short sentences.

77. We heard worrying reports that rough sleeping increases the likelihood of reoffending and that some rough sleepers may reoffend intentionally so that they have a safe place to stay. This may lead to a repeat pattern of behaviour and clearly has a wider societal cost. While we expect our above recommendation to go some way in addressing these issues, we believe that further safeguards are required.

Recommendation 5. If the Welsh Government is not minded to accept our recommendation of a phased approach to abolishing priority need (Recommendation 1), we recommend that it reinstates automatic priority need for accommodation for prison leavers.

Janet Finch-Saunders AM did not support the above recommendation.

Local connection and reconnection services

78. We heard conflicting evidence about the use of local connection and reconnection services in tackling rough sleeping. It was unclear whether the reconnections reported in evidence were pursued using the local connection provisions in section 80 of the Act or as part of local authorities' "reasonable steps" to help an individual to secure accommodation.

79. The power provided in the Act for local authorities to refer homeless applicants to another authority where they have a local connection is discretionary. We heard reports that, in some areas, there is a significant number of people who have moved from other areas that end up sleeping rough. This, combined with the current financial challenges facing local authorities, means that it may appear that there is an incentive for authorities to make use of the power.

80. We note that the intention of the local connection provisions is to ensure that no local authority should have to bear an unfair or disproportionate financial burden. Current funding arrangements are such that authorities with a high number of rough sleepers from other areas are placed at a distinct disadvantage. This may then encourage those authorities to seek to reconnect rough sleepers.

Recommendation 6. We recommend the Welsh Government considers alternative funding arrangements to ensure that the financial consequences of rough sleeping are shared more equally between the authority where the applicant has a local connection and the authority providing homelessness support services (where there is no local connection).

81. We believe that authorities should avoid pursuing reconnection where an individual is unwilling, for good reason, to return to their home authority. Given this, we welcome the emphasis placed in the Welsh Government's *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* on providing support to rough sleepers, "who wish it...[to be reconnected] within a case management approach which includes support to access accommodation and a clear transferring protocol". We believe that, if reconnection is pursued without buy-in from the individual, or in the absence of appropriate support, it is likely that the individual will return to the street.

82. While we recognise that well-managed reconnection can be, and indeed is being, legitimately and successfully pursued, we heard worrying reports of individuals being inappropriately "reconnected" to their home authorities. This suggests that some authorities may be failing to have due regard to the Code of Guidance. The Code of Guidance makes clear that where reconnection is being pursued as a "reasonable step", the relevant authorities should "work in partnership... to ensure the applicant receives supported re-connection service".

Recommendation 7. We recommend that the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities in the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness sets out clearly the steps that should be taken by local authorities to ensure that suitable support is available to rough sleepers in a receiving authority ahead of any reconnection.

Recommendation 8. We recommend that the Welsh Government monitors local authorities' use of local connection and reconnection services and the outcome for rough sleepers. The outcomes recorded and monitored should be those beyond the fact that an applicant has been reconnected.

3. Scale of rough sleeping in Wales

83. In 2015, the Welsh Government introduced an annual monitoring exercise (which has since been enhanced). This exercise is carried out by local authorities in partnership with other local agencies and is in two stages: a two-week information gathering exercise, which estimates the number of rough sleepers, and a one-night snapshot count of persons observed sleeping rough. The findings are published in the National Rough Sleeper Count.

84. The latest monitoring exercise took place from October to November 2017. In February 2018, the Welsh Government published the findings:

- Local authorities estimated that 345 persons were sleeping rough across Wales in the two weeks between 16 and 29 October 2017. This is an increase of 10% (32 persons) compared with the 2016 count.
- Local authorities reported 188 individuals observed sleeping rough across Wales between 10pm on 9 November and 5am on 10 November 2017. This was an increase of 33% (47 persons) on the previous year.
- Local authorities reported 233 emergency bed spaces across Wales. Of these, 42 (18%) were unoccupied and available on the night of the snapshot count. In 10 local authorities reporting rough sleepers on the night of the count there were no unoccupied, available emergency bed spaces.

3.1. Evaluation of current data collection methods

Evidence from respondents

85. A number of respondents commented on the current data gathering exercises for the National Rough Sleeping Count annual report. Cardiff Council noted that its Homeless Outreach Team and third sector partners carry out daily monitoring,⁶¹ whilst Wrexham County Borough Council highlighted that it works “quite closely with partner agencies, with The Wallich, with Clwyd Alyn Housing Association and other registered social landlords”.⁶²

86. Local authority representatives appeared confident about the accuracy of the Welsh Government’s current data.

⁶¹ Written evidence RS02

⁶² RoP, para 241, 8 February 2018

87. Academics highlighted that the current data is more informative when compared with some parts of the UK, and provides a good indication⁶³ of the scale of rough sleeping in Wales. However, they emphasised that the data does not provide detailed information or accurate figures of rough sleepers. Dr Mackie outlined the weaknesses with the method of data gathering:

“...it provides a snapshot only – it does not provide any indication of the ‘flow’/total number of people in need of support...”⁶⁴

88. Third sector organisations echoed the above views, with The Salvation Army suggesting that outreach services are likely to have a better insight into the true scale of rough sleepers in Wales.⁶⁵

89. The Wallich and the Salvation Army highlighted that the Welsh Government’s definition of “rough sleeping” could be a barrier to gathering accurate data.⁶⁶ The definition is:

“Persons who are sleeping overnight in the open air (such as shop doorways, bus shelters or parks) or in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks).”⁶⁷

90. A number of respondents raised concern about groups of people who may not be included in the definition and data.

3. 2. The Street Homeless Information Network (SHIN) project

91. The Wallich has recently obtained Welsh Government funding to develop the Street Homeless Information Network (SHIN) project. It outlined that the aim of SHIN is:

“...to establish a network of organisations that support and record rough sleeping data in an in-depth, consistent and continual way...If Local Authorities and other organisations collected the same sets of data on a regular basis, a much richer pool of numbers from across Wales would exist. This will make it easier for us to analyse the problem of rough sleeping, and to find solutions...the aim is to gather as much

⁶³ RoP, para 61, 8 February 2018

⁶⁴ Written evidence RS11

⁶⁵ RoP, para 386, 8 February 2018

⁶⁶ Written evidence RS15 and RS03

⁶⁷ <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2018/180201-national-rough-sleeper-count-november-2017-en.pdf>

information from each rough sleeper regarding their cause/s of homelessness, and the barriers to being housed.”⁶⁸

92. The Wallich emphasised that SHIN will provide “robust data”⁶⁹ to the Government, local authorities and others, which is necessary to improve understanding of the causes of rough sleeping and ultimately to prevent and reduce it. However, it highlighted that some organisations may be reluctant to use a new system⁷⁰ and that the project’s success “relies on all organisations working with rough sleepers to be involved and [to] use the system”.⁷¹

93. Respondents welcomed the development of the SHIN project. Shelter Cymru felt that it “will be an invaluable tool to show the true extent and cycle of homelessness in Wales”.⁷² Cymorth Cymru suggested that the system will enable organisations to better understand the scale of rough sleeping and to tailor support to meet individuals’ needs.⁷³ Similar view were expressed by Crisis.⁷⁴

94. Professor Fitzpatrick referred to the database already in use in London (The Combined Homelessness and Information Network – CHAIN), which inspired the development of SHIN, and stated that it would be a more effective way of gathering data than the current methods in Wales.⁷⁵

Evidence from the Minister

95. In outlining the current data collection methods the Minister stated that “the availability of robust data has improved over time”. Notwithstanding this, the Minister’s official recognised that there are barriers to gathering accurate data on rough sleeping, and that the current data provides a “broad indication” only of the scale.

96. The Minister highlighted that several factors could influence rough sleeper counts, “including location, timing and weather”.

97. The Minister’s official emphasised that the Welsh Government has high expectations of the SHIN project, and that when completed, it will provide a “live

⁶⁸ Written evidence RS03

⁶⁹ Written evidence RS03

⁷⁰ RoP, para 397, 8 February 2018

⁷¹ Written evidence RS03

⁷² Written evidence RS06

⁷³ Written evidence RS13

⁷⁴ RoP, para 481, 8 February 2018

⁷⁵ RoP, 58, 8 February 2018

picture of the scale of rough-sleeping”⁷⁶ at a national level. He also emphasised that the database will inform the Government’s future policy development.⁷⁷ The Government hopes that within 12 to 18 months, the SHIN project will be able to produce “very robust rough-sleeping data based on the information from services, directly from services as and when they’re encountering people”.⁷⁸

Our view

98. We acknowledge the efforts of local authorities and other services to gather data on rough sleepers in Wales. We welcome the recent improvements in the data collection methodology for the *Rough Sleeper Count*. Despite this progress, we recognise the limitations of the current methodology and estimates.

99. We believe that accurate data is key to identifying and understanding trends, to inform policy development, and to assist local authorities and their partners to plan and deliver services.

100. We welcome the Welsh Government’s commitment to the annual *Rough Sleeper Count* and the steps it is taking, through funding the SHIN project, to enhance the level and accuracy of data available on rough sleeping. We believe that the success of the SHIN project relies on the co-operation of the third sector. There must be a willingness to engage with, and commit to, the project if it is to achieve its aims. We are encouraged therefore by the positive response from respondents, including third sector service providers. This must be replicated across the sector if the project is to succeed.

Recommendation 9. We recommend that the Welsh Government ensures that relevant third sector organisations and local authorities fully engage with the SHIN project.

⁷⁶ RoP, 57, 14 February 2018

⁷⁷ RoP, 60, 14 February 2018

⁷⁸ RoP, 58, 14 February 2018

4. Causes of rough sleeping and of the recent increase in rough sleeping

Evidence from respondents

101. Respondents highlighted that there is no single cause of rough sleeping. Instead, there are multiple factors that can lead to an individual sleeping rough, including a lack of employment opportunities, a lack of affordable housing, social security policies, relationship breakdown, debt, mental and physical health issues, and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). In many cases, rough sleeping is a result of a combination of factors.

102. The Wallich believed it was important to distinguish between the reasons people lose their accommodation, and the causes of homelessness and sleeping rough. It explained that homelessness and rough sleeping are due to “the lack of one or more of the three factors required to secure alternative accommodation; ability, understanding and/or finances”.⁷⁹

103. The Welsh Refugee Council highlighted specific causes of rough sleeping among asylum seekers and refugees, including insufficient access to legal advice to support timely, well-constructed asylum claims.⁸⁰

104. The Big Issue noted that “a large portion of [its] vendors who are rough sleepers are [European Economic Area (EEA)] National and have no recourse to public funds”.⁸¹

105. Broadly speaking, respondents outlined that the causes of rough sleeping fall into two main categories: structural causes and personal factors. These are explored in more detail in the remainder of this chapter.

4. 1. Structural causes

106. The majority of respondents, including The Wallich, Llamau, The Salvation Army, local authority representatives and Dr Mackie, highlighted the impact of welfare reform as a cause of rough sleeping.⁸² In particular, changes to Housing

⁷⁹ Written evidence, RS03

⁸⁰ Written evidence, RS12

⁸¹ Written evidence, RS14

⁸² Written evidence, RS03, RS05, RS15, RS01, RS11

Benefit rates for single people (Shared Accommodation Rate⁸³) and the introduction of Universal Credit⁸⁴.

107. Some respondents, including The Wallich⁸⁵ and Community Housing Cymru⁸⁶ (CHC) raised concern about the impending rollout of Universal Credit and warned that the worst effects are yet to be seen in Wales, with the potential for evictions for rent arrears to increase.

108. Many respondents cited the lack of affordable housing as a key structural cause of homelessness. The Wallich stated that the lack of one bedroom social housing properties for single people is a particular issue in some areas.⁸⁷ This was reflected in Powys Council's evidence. It also suggested that a lack of affordable housing was particularly problematic in rural areas.⁸⁸

109. A number of respondents referred to the apparent reluctance of some landlords, both within the social and private rented sector, to house homeless households.

110. Shelter Cymru stated that approximately 18% of social housing allocations are to households that have been homeless, which is significantly lower than in England and Scotland. It explained that some Registered Social Landlords do not feel "equipped or capable" of housing individuals with complex support needs and tend to be more selective in offers of accommodation to homeless households.⁸⁹

111. Crisis echoed the above and stated that landlords in all sectors are "becoming more risk-averse".⁹⁰

⁸³ The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR, previously the Shared Room Rate) limits the Housing Benefit that a single person can receive to the average rent level charged for a room in a shared house. In April 2012, the UK Government extended the age for the SRA from single claimants under the age of 25 to those under 35.

⁸⁴ Universal Credit will replace a range of existing out of work benefits and in work tax credits, including Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. There will be a basic allowance for adults, with additions for children, disability, housing costs and caring. Universal Credit will be assessed and paid on a household basis.

⁸⁵ Written evidence, RS03

⁸⁶ Written evidence, RS18

⁸⁷ Written evidence, RS03

⁸⁸ RoP, para 181 and 253, 8 February 2018

⁸⁹ RoP, para 499, 8 February 2018

⁹⁰ RoP, para 503, 8 February 2018

112. In commenting on particular difficulties in accessing the Private Rented Sector (PRS), The Wallich explained:

“When it comes to the Private Rented Sector, landlords usually require deposits, advance rent, agency fees, and references or guarantors. In most cases the rent costs will be more than any Local Housing Allowance being claimed. These fees are often barriers for people already renting in the PRS, let alone people who will need to set up and maintain a tenancy.”⁹¹

113. Dr Mackie suggested that more “innovate solutions” are required to overcome what he believed is an assumed lack of availability of housing in the PRS. By way of example, he referred to Merthyr and the Valleys Mind’s Step by Step project, which seeks to prevent and relieve homelessness for single people in Rhondda Cynon Taff. According to the findings of the initial evaluation, the project “has gained access to a wide range of private rented sector properties, many of which the local authority has not previously engaged”. The key to this is “the volume of hand-holding provided by the team both with tenants and landlords”.⁹²

114. While Huggard acknowledged lack of affordable housing as a “major issue”, it emphasised that the “major barrier” for rough sleepers is “sustaining rather than obtaining accommodation”.⁹³ This was a recurring theme in evidence.

4. 2. Personal issues/experiences

115. A number of respondents, including Pobl Group,⁹⁴ The Wallich,⁹⁵ Llamau⁹⁶ and Powys Council⁹⁷ highlighted the link between rough sleeping and ACEs, such as neglect, domestic abuse, and parental drug and alcohol abuse.

116. Many respondents highlighted that mental health issues and substance misuse can cause, or exacerbate, rough sleeping.

⁹¹ Written evidence, RS03

⁹² Written evidence, RS11A

⁹³ Written evidence, RS04

⁹⁴ Written evidence, RS19

⁹⁵ Written evidence. RS03

⁹⁶ Written evidence, RS05

⁹⁷ RoP, para 250, 8 February 2018

4. 3. Recent increase in rough sleeping in Wales

117. While respondents agreed that the causes of rough sleeping were well researched and documented, they reported that the reason for the recent increase in rough sleeping in Wales and across the UK is less well-understood. The Salvation Army stated that “there appears to be no single, easily identifiable reason for the recent increase in rough sleeping”.⁹⁸

118. Shelter Cymru, which is currently undertaking a study to examine the causes of the recent increase in rough sleeping, explained that its early findings reflect those in the majority of existing literature and evidence. It stated:

“In short, the causes of homelessness have not significantly changed in the last few years; rather it is the prevalence of these causes that has increased.”⁹⁹

119. Notwithstanding the above, there was widespread consensus among respondents that welfare reforms are a factor in the recent increase in the number of rough sleepers in Wales.

120. Research undertaken by CHC in October 2017 found that “as a result of the working age benefit freeze, only 2% of private rented accommodation is affordable under the [Local Housing Allowance] rate”. CHC reported that this had an impact on existing tenants in sustaining their tenancies and on rough sleepers in accessing accommodation.¹⁰⁰

121. Some respondents, including The Wallich¹⁰¹ and Huggard,¹⁰² cited benefit sanctions as a particular issue.

122. The Wallich¹⁰³ and Huggard¹⁰⁴ also emphasised that the increase in rough sleepers in Wales coincides with an increase in substance misuse, including New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), and reported a significant rise in co-occurrence of substance misuse and mental health issues among rough sleepers in recent years.

⁹⁸ Written evidence, RS15

⁹⁹ Written evidence, RS06

¹⁰⁰ Written evidence, RS18

¹⁰¹ Written evidence, RS03

¹⁰² Written evidence, RS04

¹⁰³ Written evidence, RS03

¹⁰⁴ Written evidence, RS04

123. A number of respondents, including Professor Fitzpatrick,¹⁰⁵ The Wallich,¹⁰⁶ Llamau¹⁰⁷ and Shelter Cymru¹⁰⁸ suggested a link between removing automatic priority need status for prison leavers and the recent increase in rough sleeping. The issue of prison leavers is covered in detail in Chapter 2.

124. Several respondents, including Cymorth Cymru,¹⁰⁹ Llamau¹¹⁰ and The Salvation Army¹¹¹ referred to the impact of the reduction in public funding on support services, including specialist support services, which may be contributing to the increase in rough sleepers. The issue of funding is covered in more detail in Chapter 7.

Evidence from the Minister

125. The Minister echoed the views of respondents that the causes of rough sleeping are “wide and varied”.¹¹² She explained that the interaction of the structural causes with personal factors “[result] in vulnerable people unable to navigate a difficult housing market and becoming homeless” and that without an appropriate support network, “they may end up having to sleep rough”.¹¹³

126. The Minister acknowledged that “there is very limited research evidence on the causes of the recent rise in rough sleeping, although a small part of the increase may reflect improved approach to data collection”.¹¹⁴ She explained that the Welsh Government is funding research by Shelter Cymru looking at the causes of rough sleeping in Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham.¹¹⁵

127. The Minister highlighted the research being undertaken by Glyndwr University into the relationship between prison leavers and rough sleeping, as well as additional funding provided by the Welsh Government to introduce trauma-informed approach training for third sector organisations and the police service.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁵ RoP, para 72, 8 February 2018

¹⁰⁶ Written evidence, RS03

¹⁰⁷ RoP, para 435, 8 February 2018

¹⁰⁸ RoP, para 516, 8 February 2018

¹⁰⁹ Written evidence, RS13

¹¹⁰ RoP, para 376 and 401, 8 February 2018

¹¹¹ RoP, para 403, 8 February 2018

¹¹² RoP, para 73, 14 February 2018

¹¹³ Written evidence, RS20

¹¹⁴ Written evidence, RS20

¹¹⁵ RoP, para 86, 14 February 2018

¹¹⁶ RoP, para 86, 24 and 150, 14 February 2018

128. When commenting on the concerns about the barriers to accessing affordable housing, the Minister's official noted that 8,000 social housing tenancies have been used to prevent and relieve homelessness since April 2015.¹¹⁷

129. The Minister highlighted the role of the PRS and explained that the Welsh Government is working with the sector to understand the barriers preventing rough sleepers from accessing private rented accommodation.¹¹⁸ She also highlighted funding being provided to local authorities to improve access to the PRS. The Minister's official reported that local authorities use the social housing sector and the PRS "in equal measure" to house homeless households.¹¹⁹

Our view

130. The causes of rough sleeping are well-documented and relatively well-understood. They are wide ranging, and include a combination of structural and personal factors. The challenge for the Welsh Government is twofold. Not only does it need to identify and implement effective solutions to support people off the streets, but it must also seek ways to address the multiple complex causes. It is only in confronting both of these challenges that the Welsh Government will progress its aim of ending the need for people to sleep rough.

131. We have heard about the link between Adverse Childhood Experiences and rough sleeping, as well as other risk factors which make it more likely for an individual to end up sleeping rough, including leaving institutions, spending time in care, poor mental health, and substance misuse. Identifying ways in which to effectively address these issues is clearly beyond the scope of this short inquiry. But it is something that the Welsh Government must do, and it must do in a more co-ordinated manner. We return to the issue of cross-government working in Chapter 6.

132. We do not wish to underplay the personal and behavioural causes of rough sleeping. However, given the complexity of these issues, and the scope of our inquiry, we do not feel in a position to make any recommendations in this regard. For the purpose of this Chapter, we have focused on two of the main structural causes of rough sleeping, as identified by respondents, namely welfare reform and a lack of affordable housing.

¹¹⁷ RoP, para 147, 14 February 2018

¹¹⁸ RoP, para 145, 14 February 2018

¹¹⁹ RoP, para 147, 14 February 2018

Welfare reform

133. While the UK Government's welfare reform agenda is not the sole cause of rough sleeping, it is unsurprising that it is evidenced as one of the main structural causes. It is clear that changes to benefit entitlements, the increase in benefit sanctions and the introduction of Universal Credit have had a detrimental impact in Wales. Taken together, these reforms have led to a substantial reduction in the safety net available to those who are at risk of rough sleeping or who are already sleeping on the streets.

134. Predictably, welfare reforms have also been cited as a causal factor for the recent increase in rough sleeping. The biggest concern is that the full repercussions of Universal Credit are yet to be realised. It is therefore entirely possible, if not probable, that rough sleeping in Wales will continue to rise following the roll out of Universal Credit in 2018.

135. As part of our concurrent inquiry into Making the Economy Work for People on Low Incomes, we have heard about the steps the Welsh Government is taking to mitigate the impact of welfare reform. These include supporting advisory services and the introduction of the child care offer. While we welcome these, we believe that their ability to safeguard the most vulnerable people in our communities, not least rough sleepers, against the changes still to come, is limited. We believe that a stronger response from the Welsh Government is required.

136. We note that the Scottish Government has introduced regulations to provide more flexibility in the way in which Universal Credit is administered. Essentially, this will allow payments to be made twice monthly (as opposed to monthly) and to be made directly to landlords (as opposed to the claimant). In the current financial climate, and in the face of welfare reforms, managing finances is becoming increasingly challenging, not least for the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities. We believe that having the flexibility to change the payment of Universal Credit would enable the Welsh Government to adopt an approach that is better suited to meet the needs of claimants in Wales. Specifically, we believe that allowing payments to be made directly to landlords may help minimise the risk of rent arrears, which is one of the many causal factors of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Recommendation 10. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers seeking powers over the administration of Universal Credit akin to those available to the Scottish Government.

Janet Finch-Saunders AM did not support the above recommendation.

Shortage of affordable housing

137. It is well documented that demand for housing in Wales, as in the rest of the UK, far exceeds supply. In recent years, housing market conditions have led to an increase in the demand for affordable housing, and lengthy waiting lists in the social housing sector. It is unsurprising then that a lack of affordable housing, and a lack of suitable housing, is cited as a key structural cause of rough sleeping.

138. Building more affordable housing and increasing the social housing stock is key to improving access to housing for homeless households. The Welsh Government has committed to deliver 20,000 new affordable homes by the end of the Fifth Assembly. This is a welcome step, although we acknowledge there are differing views on whether this target is ambitious enough. While increasing the supply of affordable homes will contribute to the homelessness prevention agenda, it is only part of what must be a much wider solution. We believe there are additional, more immediate steps that the Welsh Government can and should take to improve access to housing for homeless households, including rough sleepers.

139. Social housing, provided by local authorities and Registered Social Landlords ('RSLs') plays a pivotal role in meeting the housing needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities, including rough sleepers. RSLs are expected to work with local authorities to assist them fulfil their housing and homelessness functions. Indeed, the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* strengthened the duty (in the *Housing Act 1996*) on RSLs to co-operate with local authorities in this regard. We are concerned about the comparatively low level of homeless households who are allocated social housing in Wales. We heard that this may be as a result of some landlords becoming increasingly selective when allocating accommodation. We believe that this requires further investigation.

Recommendation 11. We recommend that the Welsh Government works with local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to establish the reasons for the comparatively low level of social housing allocations to homeless households. Following this, the Welsh Government should set out the steps it intends to take to maximise the number of homeless households who are allocated social housing.

140. In light of ongoing housing market conditions, and a shortage of social housing, the Private Rented Sector (PRS) is playing an increasingly important role in meeting unmet housing need in Wales. In recognising this, the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* provides powers for local authorities to discharge their homelessness duties by finding accommodation for homeless households in the PRS.

141. We heard about the significant practical and financial barriers that homeless households, including rough sleepers, face in accessing private rented accommodation. These barriers, combined with the apparent reluctance of some landlords to house individuals not traditionally living in, or necessarily thought suited to, private rented accommodation, make it a challenge for rough sleepers to secure tenancies in the PRS. We believe that stronger working relationships with the PRS are key to tackling some of these issues, not least to overcome any preconceptions about the homeless community, in particular rough sleepers. Although not specifically targeted at rough sleepers, we believe that the Step-by-Step project in Rhondda Cynon Taff is a commendable example of this.

Recommendation 12. We recommend that the Welsh Government sets out more clearly in its *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* the steps it intends to take to improve access to the Private Rented Sector for rough sleepers, including details of incentives for private landlords. We recommend that the Welsh Government monitors and reports back to the Committee on the outcome of this work.

Recommendation 13. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers the lessons that can be learnt from the Step-by-Step project in Rhondda Cynon Taff, with a view to rolling out similar projects across Wales.

5. Effectiveness and availability of services including emergency accommodation

Evidence from respondents

142. Several respondents, including The Big Issue¹²⁰ and The Salvation Army, commented on the excellent work being undertaken by frontline service providers with limited resources and in what The Salvation Army described as “difficult circumstances”.¹²¹

143. Respondents reported that a wide range of services, both accommodation based and support services, is available to rough sleepers. However, there was general agreement that provision varied across local authorities and between areas. The WLGA explained that “all local authorities have some services available to support rough sleepers” and that these are “commissioned and provided based on local needs assessments and evidence from counts and other information gathering exercises”.¹²²

5. 1. Emergency and temporary accommodation

144. There was widespread agreement among respondents that emergency accommodation, when used appropriately, plays an important role in tackling rough sleeping. The Salvation Army emphasised that emergency accommodation not only provides a safe place for individuals to stay, but that it facilitates “a process of engagement with a rough sleeper with complex needs”.¹²³ In contrast, Llamau asserted that hostels were not suitable and should not be used to house vulnerable people.¹²⁴

145. Many respondents, including local authority representatives, The Big Issue,¹²⁵ CHC,¹²⁶ Pobl Group, Llamau¹²⁷ and Shelter Cymru¹²⁸ highlighted an unwillingness among some rough sleepers to access emergency accommodation. Shelter

¹²⁰ Written evidence, RS14

¹²¹ Written evidence, RS15

¹²² Written evidence, RS01

¹²³ Written evidence, RS15

¹²⁴ RoP, para 360, 8 February 2018

¹²⁵ Written evidence, RS14

¹²⁶ Written evidence, RS19

¹²⁷ Written evidence, RS05

¹²⁸ Written evidence, RS06

Cymru reported that its research had shown quality of provision as an issue, “with nearly all rough sleepers saying that they felt the current provision was too unsafe, unhealthy and intimidating”.¹²⁹ Other reasons for individuals not accessing emergency accommodation include drug use, bullying and criminal activity.

146. Linked to the above, several respondents referred to the number of vacant emergency beds recorded in the 2016 and 2017 Rough Sleeper Count, despite a significant number of individuals sleeping rough at the time of the counts. According to The Wallich¹³⁰ and Llamau,¹³¹ this suggests that the emergency accommodation on offer does not sufficiently meet the needs of some rough sleepers.

147. Huggard explained that individuals may be excluded from emergency accommodation due to anti-social behaviour, including substance misuse. It also explained that time restrictions (individuals not being able to arrive late at night, or to come and go) create a barrier for individuals involved in street culture activities or needing to feed addictions during the night.¹³²

148. Pobl Group highlighted that the exclusion of couples and individuals with pets is a particular issue and emphasised the need for “appropriate and accessible accommodation which respect and reflect the strengths and positives that key personal relationships can bring to people’s lives”.¹³³ This issue was also raised by residents at Solas Cymru’s Clarence Place Complex Needs Scheme.

149. CHC suggested that more needs to be done to understand the reluctance among some rough sleepers to access emergency accommodation “so that more appropriate accommodation can be provided in future, which rough sleepers will choose to access and begin their journey towards independence and sustaining their own tenancy”.¹³⁴

150. Several respondents reported a lack of emergency or temporary accommodation in some local authority areas as a particular issue. Shelter Cymru explained that, in the absence of emergency accommodation, some individuals resort to begging to meet the cost of Bed & Breakfast accommodation.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Written evidence, RS06

¹³⁰ Written evidence, RS03

¹³¹ Written evidence, RS05

¹³² Written evidence, RS04

¹³³ Written evidence, RS19

¹³⁴ Written evidence, RS18

¹³⁵ Written evidence, RS06

151. According to The Wallich, the demand for temporary accommodation in some areas is increasing “to the extent that services are stretched”. It also stated that the amount of temporary accommodation “has not been balanced by increases in floating support services to support vulnerable people who are temporarily housed”.¹³⁶

152. A few respondents, including the Welsh Refugee Council¹³⁷ explained that individuals may remain in emergency or temporary accommodation for extended periods. This is due either to a lack of suitable move-on accommodation or because individuals are insufficiently prepared to manage a supported tenancy or to live independently. Huggard highlighted that placing ill-prepared individuals in a tenancy “undermines their self-confidence and further hinders future progression”.¹³⁸

153. Cymorth Cymru,¹³⁹ Crisis¹⁴⁰ and Dr Mackie¹⁴¹ referred to the findings of the *International Evidence Review*, which concluded that emergency accommodation is only an effective intervention if stays are limited to exceptionally short periods.

154. Dr Mackie asserted that “hostels as a mainstay of intervention aren’t effective”. He expanded on this:

“Hostels and shelters are intended to fulfil an emergency function and they vary substantially in terms of size, client group, type of building, levels and nature of support, behavioural expectations, and nature and enforcement of rules. In relation to large-scale hostels, with limited support, evidence indicates consistently that homeless people find them unpleasant environments. Significantly, a lack of move on housing stymies the system, preventing hostels from fulfilling their intended emergency or temporary functions and forcing them to operate as longer-term but unsuitable solutions to street homelessness. Unfortunately, this form of intervention continues to play a role in some Welsh towns and cities.”¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Written evidence, RS03

¹³⁷ Written evidence, RS12

¹³⁸ Written evidence, RS04

¹³⁹ Written evidence, RS13

¹⁴⁰ Written evidence, RS07

¹⁴¹ Written evidence, RS11 and RoP, para 93, 8 February 2018

¹⁴² Written evidence, RS11

5. 2. Outreach and other support services

155. The WLGA reported that alongside emergency accommodation, local authorities also provide “assistance with alcohol and/or substance misuse, mental health provision, tenancy and pre-tenancy support services, and finance and debt advice”.¹⁴³ This was reflected in the evidence of other local authority representatives.

156. While Dr Mackie acknowledged the range of services available, he asserted that one of the “key limitations of current services in Wales” is that of “unsuitable, absent or inadequate support”. He pointed out that local authorities have no statutory obligation to meet the housing-related support needs of the homeless community, including rough sleepers. As such, many individuals “go unsupported”. Additionally, he emphasised that “time limits on support can be particularly problematic”.¹⁴⁴

157. Many respondents highlighted the use of outreach services, not only to provide immediate support to rough sleepers, but to provide advice and signpost to relevant support services.

158. Cardiff Council outlined its frontline services for rough sleepers, including the Homeless Outreach Team; The Wallich Rough Sleeper projects; and The Salvation Army Bus Project.¹⁴⁵

159. The Salvation Army explained that a “significant aspect” of its outreach work focuses on supporting individuals to re-engage with services. Its Cardiff Bus Project has a 98% success rate of supporting rough sleepers into temporary accommodation and to access the various health services they require.¹⁴⁶

160. Dr Mackie highlighted Cardiff Council’s Homeless Outreach Team as one of few examples of “assertive outreach”, which he believed is key to tackling rough sleeping.¹⁴⁷ The issue of assertive outreach is covered in more detail in Chapter 6.

¹⁴³ Written evidence, RS01

¹⁴⁴ Written evidence, RS11

¹⁴⁵ Written evidence, RS02

¹⁴⁶ Written evidence, RS15

¹⁴⁷ Written evidence, RS11A

5. 3. Physical and mental health services and substance misuse services

161. The majority of respondents referred to difficulties for rough sleepers in accessing health services, including mental health services, as well as substance misuse services and treatment programmes.

162. Shelter Cymru reported that individuals with serious physical conditions, such as Hepatitis C and HIV are unable to access treatment without an address.¹⁴⁸ Marie Curie raised concern that rough sleepers with terminal illness may have particular difficulties in accessing specialist palliative care services.¹⁴⁹

163. Shelter Cymru also reported that some individuals with disclosed diagnosis of serious mental illness are unable to obtain medication.¹⁵⁰ Llamau highlighted difficulties in accessing mental health services for young people.¹⁵¹ Similar issues were raised by residents at The Salvation Army who reported difficulty in accessing mental health provision, with one resident reporting that they waited 18 months to receive treatment.

164. Respondents, including Cardiff Council¹⁵² and The Wallich,¹⁵³ reported a shortage in specialist and intensive support services, in particular for individuals with a dual diagnosis of mental health and substance misuse issues.

165. Pobl Group¹⁵⁴ and Wrexham Council¹⁵⁵ emphasised the need to ensure rapid access to treatment programmes following a decision by an individual to seek or accept support.

166. Respondents emphasised that, where support needs are unmet, it often has a knock-on effect on maintaining engagement with individuals who may subsequently be excluded from provision for substance misuse issues or anti-social behaviour.

¹⁴⁸ Written evidence, RS06

¹⁴⁹ Written evidence, RS16

¹⁵⁰ Written evidence, RS06

¹⁵¹ RoP, para 367, 8 February 2018

¹⁵² RoP, para 201, 8 February 2018

¹⁵³ RoP, para 357, 8 February 2018

¹⁵⁴ Written evidence, RS19

¹⁵⁵ RoP, para 199, 8 February 2018

Evidence from the Minister

167. The Minister acknowledged that emergency accommodation is not meeting the needs of rough sleepers, especially women and couples, those with pets, and those unwilling or unable to comply with no alcohol or no substance misuse rules.¹⁵⁶

168. The Minister also acknowledged that specialist emergency accommodation is limited or non-existent in some (particularly rural) areas, with bed and breakfast accommodation being the only viable alternative.¹⁵⁷

169. The Minister described emergency accommodation as a “10 hour sticking plaster”, and believed that secure tenancies using a Housing First approach are a better long-term solution.¹⁵⁸ She explained that the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* requires local authorities to consider their provision of emergency accommodation, including their ability to meet the needs of those with pets, couples and women.

170. In commenting on the provision of outreach services, the Minister stated:

“Outreach services exist in the larger urban areas and they have daily contact with most rough sleepers...Services funded by the Welsh Government are expected to be proactive in helping rough sleepers into accommodation.”

171. The Minister emphasised that the Welsh Government’s ***Together for Mental Health - Delivery Plan 2016-19*** highlights “housing needs and timely access to mental health services as a key priority for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed”. She explained that a number of projects are being funded from additional £2.6 million grant funding to support new service developments to tackle rough sleeping and youth homelessness. For example, a project in Wrexham to provide training for outreach workers on understanding and supporting rough sleepers with mental health issues.¹⁵⁹

Our view

172. We heard about the provision of a broad range of accommodation and services to address not only the housing needs, but also the wider support needs,

¹⁵⁶ RoP, para 91, 14 February 2018

¹⁵⁷ Written evidence, RS20

¹⁵⁸ RoP, para 93, 14 February 2018

¹⁵⁹ RoP, para 87, 14 February 2018

of rough sleepers. However, it appears that the type of provision varies and in some areas there are gaps in provision. While rural areas may face particular geographical challenges in delivering comprehensive provision, large urban areas, including those with well-developed services, may struggle to meet demand and report gaps in specialist and intensive support services.

Emergency accommodation

173. We heard that the availability of suitable emergency accommodation currently plays an important role in tackling rough sleeping. Emergency accommodation may take a variety of forms, including night shelters and hostels. The nature of the support and services available within emergency accommodation may vary considerably. Some may be largely unsupported, while others may also provide non-housing support services.

174. A range of emergency accommodation is provided across local authority areas. However, we heard that in some areas there is a shortage of provision or of specialist provision. This means that the immediate and short-term housing needs of rough sleepers go unmet, and individuals may feel they have no choice other than to sleep rough. We are concerned about this.

175. Despite the recent increase in the number of rough sleepers, the latest Rough Sleeper Count has shown a significant number of vacant emergency beds at the time of the count. This may be explained, at least in part, by the reluctance to access emergency accommodation, not least because of poor conditions and safety concerns. In addition, for some rough sleepers, the institutional rules are too restrictive and too difficult to follow. For example, those who have substance and alcohol addictions, and those who engage in night time street activities.

176. Given the above, we are concerned that emergency accommodation provision is failing to meet the needs of a significant number of rough sleepers. As such, even when emergency accommodation is available, some would prefer to sleep rough. We believe that this issue must be addressed, not only to improve outcomes, but to demonstrate that limited resources are being targeted effectively.

177. We acknowledge that a number of the actions within the Welsh Government's *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* may help to address some of our concerns about access to suitable emergency accommodation, and we welcome these. However, we believe that further work is required.

178. We welcome the commitment in the Action Plan to conduct research to understand the causes of the recent increase in rough sleeping and identify opportunities to improve its prevention, including the role and suitability of emergency and temporary accommodation.

179. We acknowledge that the purpose of emergency accommodation is to help support rough sleepers off the street and house them on a temporary basis before they secure settled accommodation. There are clear examples of this working effectively in some areas. However, it is evident that, in some cases, emergency accommodation is being used to house individuals in the longer-term. This is primarily because of difficulties in accessing move-on accommodation, including supported accommodation, a shortage of affordable social housing, and barriers to accessing private rented accommodation.

180. We welcome the Welsh Government's intention to improve move-on from emergency accommodation to release bed spaces, as set out in its Action Plan. However, we believe that further detail is needed.

Recommendation 14. We recommend that the Welsh Government provides further detail in its *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* on how it intends to work with local authorities and their partners to improve move-on from emergency accommodation.

181. We refer the Welsh Government to our previous recommendations relating to social housing and the Private Rented Sector in Chapter 4.

Outreach support services

182. It is clear that outreach services are widely regarded as essential services and fulfil a number of functions. Some services primarily meet the immediate needs of rough sleepers, for example through the provision of food or clothing. However, they also provide a valuable point of contact for those who are unwilling, for various reasons, to attend site-based services, and are often the first step in engaging them with services.

183. We heard that outreach support services are widely used across local authority areas, although the type and level of support varies, and services are better developed in some areas than others. We heard of some innovative examples, including those delivered in Cardiff. The Outreach Team in Cardiff carries out homelessness assessments on the street, and has an impressive success rate for supporting rough sleepers into temporary accommodation.

184. While outreach services are undoubtedly considered a critical component in tackling rough sleeping, we heard concerns that some services may simply help sustain people who are living on the street. We also heard that “assertive outreach” is more effective. We note that Cardiff Council’s Homeless Outreach Team was cited as a form of “assertive outreach”. This is covered in detail in Chapter 6.

Mental health and substance misuse services

185. As previously mentioned, many rough sleepers have multiple and complex support needs due to mental health issues. The provision of effective mental health services and substance misuse services is therefore crucial in order to support the Welsh Government’s aim of ending the need for people to sleep rough.

186. We heard some positive examples of multi-service interventions, with mental health nurses attached to outreach teams in some areas. This provides a means of engaging those with mental health issues, who may not otherwise be known to services. While this is a welcome innovation, we are concerned that it will have limited success in supporting rough sleepers, and more broadly in tackling rough sleeping, if it is not backed by rapid access to treatment.

187. Given the above, we are concerned about the barriers experienced in accessing mental health services either to receive diagnosis or treatment, and in some cases both. We heard worrying, first-hand accounts of individuals waiting long periods for treatment.

188. We acknowledge that the issue of waiting times for mental health services continues to be a matter of debate and is of wider concern. With this in mind, we believe it is unacceptable that some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities have to wait such excessive periods to receive treatment, as reported in evidence to us. We heard that untreated mental health issues make it more difficult for individuals to effectively engage with services and therefore decreases the likelihood of supporting them off the street. Furthermore, even if successfully housed, without suitable treatment individuals may have difficulties in maintaining a tenancy, which increases the likelihood of evictions and of repeated rough sleeping.

189. A similar picture emerges in relation to the provision of substance misuse services and treatment programmes.

190. There is much commendable work being undertaken by the sector to support rough sleepers with drug and alcohol addictions, for example, harm reduction services, such as Huggard’s needle exchange programme. However, it is

clear that access to substance misuse services and treatment programmes is also problematic and is therefore a barrier to tackling rough sleeping. We heard that, rapid access, following a decision by the individual to address their addiction is crucial, but in many cases unlikely.

191. As set out in Chapter 3, we heard worrying accounts that the recent increase in rough sleeping coincides with an increase in substance misuse among this cohort, including a rise in the use of New Psychoactive Substances. Regardless of any causal link between the two, we are concerned that, without an improvement in substance misuse services and programmes, limited progress in tackling rough sleeping will be made. As with mental health issues, untreated substance misuse issues make engaging with services more difficult, or even impossible. It may also lead to repeat cycles of rough sleeping.

192. Perhaps of most concern then is the rise in co-occurrence of substance misuse and mental health issues among rough sleepers. We heard that meeting the needs of those experiencing both requires specialist support. Again, we heard widespread reports about a lack of access to specialist support, and of no support of this type in certain areas.

193. As mentioned in Chapter 4, given the scope of this inquiry and the complexity of these issues, we do not feel in a position to make any recommendations in this regard. However, we refer the Welsh Government to our conclusions and recommendation in Chapter 6 on cross-government working.

6. Steps to prevent and tackle rough sleeping

Evidence from respondents

194. Crisis' *Ending rough sleeping: what works, An international evidence review* suggests that an effective approach to tackle rough sleeping should be underpinned by the following key principles: recognise heterogeneity; swift action; assertive outreach leading to a suitable accommodation offer; housing-led; and person-centred support and choice.¹⁶⁰

6. 1. Housing First

195. There was strong support among respondents for the wide scale introduction of Housing First¹⁶¹ across Wales, with some respondents specifically suggesting that this should be combined with assertive outreach (see below). Reasons provided by respondents in support of Housing First were that:

- it has been successful in other parts of the UK and further afield,
- it has proven to be a cost-effective housing solution, and
- it is based around the principle of a human right to housing.

196. According to Crisis' *International Evidence Review*:

“The evidence base on [Housing First] is exceptionally strong; far stronger than is true for any other housing-related intervention targeting rough sleepers in fact.

[Housing First] is best known for its excellent housing retention outcomes, which are especially impressive given that the intervention targets homeless people with complex needs. Retention figures (measured in variable ways over different timeframes) range between 60 – 90 per cent, and typically coalesce around the 80 per cent mark.”¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ ***Ending rough sleeping: what works, An international evidence review.*** December 2017

¹⁶¹ The 'Housing First' approach uses permanent housing as a starting point rather than an end goal. It seeks to provide immediate access to permanent housing for people who are homeless. Ongoing support services are provided to help people successfully maintain a tenancy and integrate into the community.

¹⁶² ***Ending rough sleeping: what works, An international evidence review.*** December 2017

197. Cymorth Cymru reported that it was “keen to see Housing First as a model launched across Wales”. It highlighted that in Glasgow, Housing First had “exceeded expectations”, and a pilot in Manchester had produced savings of £2.51 for every £1 invested.¹⁶³

198. Similar views were expressed by Pobl Group who referred to the success of Housing First in New York, Finland and Canada.¹⁶⁴

199. Shelter Cymru believed that “Housing First as a principle needs to be embedded across the housing and homelessness system” and stated:

“We need to move away from the current system of emergency accommodation and ‘staircasing’ people into permanent housing. Although there will always be a need for some emergency beds, the emphasis for public spending should be on the provision of suitable permanent homes.”¹⁶⁵

200. CIH explained that “the most basic guiding principle of Housing First is that housing is a human right and that it should be the starting point of supporting a person to recover from other issues such as addiction and poor mental health”.¹⁶⁶ Shelter Cymru¹⁶⁷ and Pobl Group¹⁶⁸ also endorsed a rights based approach to housing.

201. A number of respondents, including Dr Mackie and Professor Fitzpatrick emphasised that one of the key features of Housing First is “stickability”, which is something that may require further culture change.¹⁶⁹

202. This issue of “stickability” is also referred to in Dr Mackie and Crisis’ *International Evidence Review*, which emphasised that Housing First is characterised by “person centred support” which is “available to tenants for as long as they need it, with a level of “stickiness” not seen in other [housing] models”. The Review goes on to state:

¹⁶³ Written evidence, RS13

¹⁶⁴ Written evidence, RS19

¹⁶⁵ Written evidence, RS06

¹⁶⁶ Written evidence, RS17

¹⁶⁷ Written evidence, RS06

¹⁶⁸ Written evidence, RS19

¹⁶⁹ RoP, para 23, and para 25-26, 8 February 2018

“Indeed, key to [Housing First] is that clients do not lose their housing if they choose not to access support, and harm reduction is taken above any other goal such as sobriety or abstinence.”¹⁷⁰

203. Both Professor Fitzpatrick and Dr Mackie expressed a strong preference for the scattered model of Housing First.¹⁷¹

204. Professor Fitzpatrick raised concern that the Welsh Government’s ***Housing First – National Principles and Guidance for Wales*** (the Housing First Guidance) had been “overly influenced” by the congregate model, which she believed was “a mistake”. She explained that, while Finland and Denmark had originally adopted the congregate model, they have now moved towards a scattered model, which has proved more effective.¹⁷² Dr Mackie raised similar points.¹⁷³

205. While Professor Fitzpatrick acknowledged that Housing First is “not a panacea”, she made clear that it should not be reserved for individuals for whom hostels or supported accommodation are not effective, but instead, should be the “default” model. Professor Fitzpatrick believed that the Housing First Guidance should reflect this.¹⁷⁴

206. Dr Mackie echoed the above view. He raised concern that the approach taken by local authorities in deciding to whom they should offer Housing First may lead to “selectivity, with more vulnerable and chaotic individuals excluded from the provision”. He recommended that further guidance is provided to authorities “making it clear which groups Housing First is intended for”.¹⁷⁵

207. Many respondents including Shelter Cymru¹⁷⁶ and the WLGA¹⁷⁷ emphasised the need for partnership working, both within government and across sectors, if Housing First is to be successful, with a particular emphasis on the role of the health sector.

208. Cymorth Cymru, a firm supporter of Housing First, warned:

¹⁷⁰ ***Ending rough sleeping: what works. An international evidence review***, December 2017

¹⁷¹ The “scattered” (or dispersed) site Housing First model is where homes are dispersed across the geographic area, whereas the “congregate” model involves a single building with containing many homes.

¹⁷² RoP, para 99 and 157, 8 February 2018

¹⁷³ Written evidence, RS11A

¹⁷⁴ RoP, para 148, 8 February 2018

¹⁷⁵ Written evidence, RS11A

¹⁷⁶ RoP, para 550, 8 February 2018

¹⁷⁷ Written evidence, RS01

“Key in the success of Housing First, is the engagement with health, both in terms of physical health needs but also mental health. This is an area where the Welsh Government launch of Housing First projects could run the risk of failure, or underachievement. A lack of health involvement could see the potential of Housing First unrealised.”¹⁷⁸

209. It emphasised the need for cross-departmental working in the Welsh Government and for the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services “to very publicly put his support behind this agenda”.¹⁷⁹

6. 2. Assertive outreach

210. Dr Mackie explained that, in terms of effectiveness, “assertive outreach”¹⁸⁰ provides much better outcomes for rough sleepers, as evidenced in Crisis’ *International Evidence Review*.

211. Dr Mackie pointed out that there are currently very few providers offering assertive outreach in Wales.¹⁸¹ A similar view was expressed by Professor Fitzpatrick who suggested that Wales, much like Scotland, has yet to fully develop assertive outreach services in the same way as other areas, particularly London.¹⁸²

212. The Welsh Government’s *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* includes the promotion of “assertive outreach services” as a means of tackling rough sleeping.¹⁸³ While Dr Mackie “strongly welcomes the move towards assertive outreach”, he questioned whether this would be taken forward by all local authorities without a corresponding statutory requirement on authorities to provide this type of intervention.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Written evidence, RS13

¹⁷⁹ Written evidence, RS13

¹⁸⁰ The International Evidence Review defines “assertive outreach” as follows: “Assertive outreach is a particular form of street outreach that targets the most disengaged rough sleepers with chronic support needs and seeks to end their homelessness. It can be defined by three distinctive facets: 1] The primary aim is to end homelessness; 2] Multi-disciplinary support; 3] Persistent, purposeful, assertive support.”

¹⁸¹ RoP, para 12, 8 February 2018

¹⁸² RoP, para 117, 8 February 2018

¹⁸³ Welsh Government’s *Rough Sleeping Action Plan*, February 2018

¹⁸⁴ Written evidence, RS11A

6. 3. Trauma-based approach

213. As previously mentioned, a number of respondents highlighted the link between rough sleeping and ACEs and other traumatic events, such as domestic abuse and bereavement. Several respondents, including Shelter Cymru,¹⁸⁵ Cymorth Cymru,¹⁸⁶ The Big Issue¹⁸⁷ and The Salvation Army,¹⁸⁸ advocated a trauma-based approach to supporting rough sleepers.

214. Cymorth Cymru reported that it has been taking forward the development of the PATH training programme (funded by the Welsh Government), which aims to support the prevention of homelessness through trauma-based approaches to meeting people's housing and support needs.¹⁸⁹

215. It explained:

“This approach ensures that staff at all levels of an organisation are trained to respond in a specific way to individuals based on appreciation of their situation and experiences. It allows for an individualised service, one that is flexible for the individual, and it has achieved success in engaging those traditionally seen as ‘hard to reach’.”¹⁹⁰

216. While Cymorth Cymru commended the Welsh Government's Housing Directorate for engaging in the trauma-based approach, it emphasised the need to extend this across the Cabinet and across public services.¹⁹¹

6. 4. Enforcement

217. The *Vagrancy Act 1824* makes begging a recordable offence with a maximum sentence of a fine at level 3 on the standard scale (currently £1,000). Other provisions also criminalise begging behaviour. The *Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014* provides broad powers to tackle a range of anti-social behaviour, including dispersal powers and the power to issue Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs).

¹⁸⁵ Written evidence, RS06

¹⁸⁶ Written evidence, RS13

¹⁸⁷ Written evidence, RS14

¹⁸⁸ Written evidence, RS15

¹⁸⁹ Written evidence, RS13

¹⁹⁰ Written evidence, RS13

¹⁹¹ RoP, para 476, 8 February 2018

218. Shelter Cymru emphasised the need to “be extremely cautious about the use of enforcement powers”¹⁹² and stated there was “a definite gap between policy and practice”¹⁹³ in relation to how these powers are used. Shelter Cymru, referred to its recent research, which highlighted “numerous examples of enforcement being used in heavy-handed and inappropriate ways”.¹⁹⁴

219. Similarly, The Wallich explained an increase in the use of PSPOs in some city centres to address begging and, in some cases, rough sleeping. This may effectively prevent individuals from attending appointments, which may lead to them incurring a fine, or even risk prison terms.¹⁹⁵

220. Several respondents emphasised the need to differentiate between street lifestyles (including begging) and anti-social behaviour, and rough sleeping. Crisis suggested that there is “a lot of confusion” about these “very, very different issues” and that “some of those [enforcement] orders demonstrate that confusion”.¹⁹⁶

221. The Big Issue suggested that training on the trauma-based approach could effectively assist the police when engaging with rough sleepers.¹⁹⁷ Shelter Cymru raised similar points.¹⁹⁸

222. Local authority representatives were keen to emphasise that enforcement powers are not widely used within their areas. Where there are used it is for the purpose of tackling anti-social behaviour, including “aggressive begging” and not to address rough sleeping.¹⁹⁹

223. In commenting on the use of enforcement powers, South Wales Police asserted:

“Importantly, proportionality and necessity are tests which are applied by all police officers before coercive action is taken, providing contact details for outreach services and making referrals to partner agencies

¹⁹² Written evidence, RS06

¹⁹³ RoP, para 581, 8 February 2018

¹⁹⁴ Written evidence, RS06

¹⁹⁵ Written evidence, RS03

¹⁹⁶ RoP, para 578, 8 February 2018

¹⁹⁷ RoP, para 579, 8 February 2018

¹⁹⁸ RoP, para 586, 8 February 2018

¹⁹⁹ RoP, para 325, 327 and 332, 8 February 2018

are often the primary response of both police officers and community support officers.”²⁰⁰

224. South Wales Police also asserted that it “[does] not move people on for rough sleeping”.²⁰¹ It emphasised that rough sleeping “is not an offence” and that “there must be an element of anti-social behaviour” in order for an officer to take enforcement action.²⁰² When dispersal orders are issued, individuals are permitted to return to the area for “essential services, such as outreach, the soup run, and other commitments they may have”.²⁰³

225. South Wales Police explained that its officers are instructed to use their body worn cameras when interacting with rough sleepers.²⁰⁴ These cameras have been proven to alter behaviour, and footage can be reviewed to ensure that rough sleepers were treated with respect and empathy.²⁰⁵

6. 5. “Diverted giving” schemes

226. There were mixed views from respondents about “diverted giving” (or “alternative giving”) schemes as a means of tackling street begging. Respondents were keen to emphasise that not all rough sleepers beg and not all street beggars are homeless or sleeping rough.

227. Huggard called for “steps to redirect the care and compassion shown by the public that is currently increasing the ‘gravitational pull’ of begging and is in turn prolonging and exacerbating rough sleeping through”, including the development of diverted giving schemes.²⁰⁶

228. The Big Issue, which has undertaken research into various diverted giving schemes (mainly in England) highlighted the Cambridge scheme as “quite innovative” with “a lot of potential”.²⁰⁷ However, the Big Issue also stated that some schemes are “absolutely horrifying – some images used, some language used that just really demonises the homeless”.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ Written evidence, RS08

²⁰¹ RoP, para 669, 8 February 2018

²⁰² RoP, para 669, 8 February 2018

²⁰³ RoP, para 669, 8 February 2018

²⁰⁴ RoP, para 628, 8 February 2018

²⁰⁵ RoP, para 636, 8 February 2018

²⁰⁶ Written evidence, RS04

²⁰⁷ RoP, para 539, 8 February 2018

²⁰⁸ RoP, para 593, 8 February 2018

229. Shelter Cymru “voices caution” about the introduction of “diverted giving schemes”. It explained:

“In at least one local authority in Wales there is a genuine need for people to beg as it is their only chance of affording emergency B&B accommodation. We are concerned that depriving people of this income while there are such gaps in service provision could lead to more serious consequences both for homeless people and the wider community, as well as increased stigmatisation of people with no choice but to beg for income.”²⁰⁹

230. Dr Mackie also expressed caution about the widespread introduction of diverted giving schemes. He questioned how the Welsh Government would “[promote] a positive message to the public about the best way to help a rough sleeper”, as set out in its Action Plan. He stated that he hoped this would not involve “blanket alternative giving responses”.²¹⁰

Evidence from the Minister

231. The Minister explained that the Welsh Government is looking at all forms of Housing First, and that it will be for local authorities to decide which model to follow. The Welsh Government expects Housing First to be used by local authorities in all local contexts.²¹¹

232. The Minister emphasised that the Welsh Government is “very much committed in terms of working much more closely than ever before across Government on the health and housing agenda”.²¹² She cited the Government’s Substance Misuse Delivery Plan as an example of this.²¹³ The Minister explained that there is a senior health and housing group within Welsh Government, as well as a dedicated member of staff working on the health and housing agenda across government to ensure a joined-up approach.²¹⁴

233. The Minister reported that “many people who are sleeping rough have very, very limited contact with health services generally”.²¹⁵ She acknowledged that further work is needed to ensure the provision of on-going support for rough

²⁰⁹ Written evidence, RS06

²¹⁰ Written evidence, RS11A

²¹¹ RoP, para 135-136, 14 February 2018

²¹² RoP, para 64, 14 February 2018

²¹³ RoP, para 65, 14 February 2018

²¹⁴ RoP, para 64, 14 February 2018

²¹⁵ RoP, para 76, 14 February 2018

sleepers with health issues, and highlighted the importance of the “key worker” component of the Housing First approach in this regard.²¹⁶

234. On the role of the police service in tackling rough sleeping, the Minister explained that she is “keen for the Welsh Government to work very closely with the police” to support rough sleepers into accommodation.²¹⁷ She also explained that she was “seeking to work with the police to roll out the trauma-informed training to [Police Community Support Officers]” and other frontline workers within the service.²¹⁸

235. On the issue of diverted giving schemes, the Minister’s official reported that there is no clear evidence base about which methods of diverted giving are most effective at tackling rough sleeping.²¹⁹

Our view

236. Each rough sleeper will have their own unique account of how they came to be sleeping rough. As previously mentioned, while there are identifiable common causes and risk factors which make it more likely for individuals to end up sleeping rough, no two accounts will be the same. This is one of a number of reasons that makes preventing and tackling rough sleeping a particularly challenging task; but one that the Welsh Government must rise to meet.

237. We welcome the publication of the Government’s *Rough Sleeping Action Plan*, which is particularly timely given the findings of the latest *Rough Sleeper Count*. The Plan was published shortly before we took evidence to inform our work, so we did not have an opportunity to consider it in detail. However, our initial assessment is that the Plan is a positive development, with the potential to bring about change if implemented effectively. Many of the actions within the Plan seek to address the issues raised by respondents during our inquiry, and align with the key principles of an effective approach to tackling rough sleeping, outlined in evidence to us. We are encouraged by this.

238. The Plan will only be successful in driving forward change if it is implemented effectively and is resourced adequately. On the issue of resources, we refer the Welsh Government to our recommendation in Chapter 7. Effective implementation of the Plan is reliant on a number of factors, including strong

²¹⁶ RoP, para 76, 14 February 2018

²¹⁷ RoP, para 149, 14 February 2018

²¹⁸ RoP, para 150, 14 February 2018

²¹⁹ RoP, para 155, 14 February 2018

leadership, ownership and accountability, a shared understanding, and in this case, cross-Government and cross-sector working. We return to the latter issue later in this Chapter.

239. The Action Plan makes clear that frontline services, including those delivered by local authorities, will primarily be responsible for taking forward actions outlined in the Plan. However, there is limited detail against each action in this regard. We are concerned that this may cause confusion, and result in a lack of ownership and accountability, which could hinder implementation. As such, we believe that this should be addressed.

Recommendation 15. We recommend that the Rough Sleeping Action Plan sets out more clearly:

- who will be responsible for taking forward each action, and
- the outcomes expected against actions, and how these will be measured and monitored (beyond the quarterly reporting arrangements referred to in the Plan).

240. On the issue of monitoring, we note that progress on the implementation of the Action Plan will be reported, on a quarterly basis, to the Rough Sleepers Working Group, the Homelessness Strategies Working Group, and the Minister for Housing and Regeneration. However, we believe that these reports should be made publicly available to ensure transparency, enhanced accountability and enable public scrutiny.

Recommendation 16. We recommend that quarterly reports on the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* should be published on the Welsh Government's website.

241. In the remainder of this Chapter, we make a number of recommendations that we expect the Welsh Government to consider in taking forward the Action Plan and the Housing First Guidance. Some of our recommendations may require revisions to these documents, which we expect to be made as a matter of urgency.

242. One of the recurring issues raised by respondents was that a lack of housing is not the only, or even the principal challenge, faced by those sleeping rough. Mental and physical health issues, as well as substance misuse issues, are commonly reported among this cohort. These issues, often co-occurring, mean that many rough sleepers have multiple and complex support needs which will not be addressed by purely helping them to secure accommodation. With this in mind, we believe that the only effective way to meet the challenge of preventing

and tackling rough sleeping is through a cross-Government and cross-sector approach.

243. Cross-sector working between health and housing will be critical to improve outcomes for rough sleepers, particularly in view of the anticipated widespread introduction of a Housing First approach in Wales. The Action Plan sets out the Welsh Government's expectations for joint working across services to meet the needs of rough sleepers, which we welcome. We also welcome the steps being taken to strengthen cross-sector working at an official level within relevant Government departments. However, we are concerned that this will only go so far. We believe that stronger leadership is required to firmly embed a cross-sector approach to preventing and tackling rough sleeping in Wales, and to demonstrate the Welsh Government's commitment to this approach.

Recommendation 17. We recommend that responsibility for the implementation of the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* should be shared jointly between the Minister for Housing and Regeneration and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services.

A preventative approach in Wales

244. We acknowledge that the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* should be viewed within the context of the Welsh Government's wider homelessness prevention agenda, including the implementation of the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014*. However, we know that this Act has, to date, had limited impact on rough sleepers. The Action Plan sets out a number of actions aimed at preventing rough sleeping. While we welcome these actions, it is clear that they fall short of the preventative approach which we believe the Government should be seeking to develop. We are also keen to see the objectives of the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, particularly in relation to prevention, embedded into all work to tackle rough sleeping.

245. If Wales' ultimate goal is to prevent rough sleeping and not just to tackle the visible signs of people sleeping on the streets, it must take firmer preventative action. This action must take account of the causes of, and risk factors associated with, rough sleeping. We note the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence is undertaking work to draw together an emerging international evidence base on preventing rough sleeping. We hope that this will provide a firm basis on which to identify further preventative actions that can be taken forward to end rough sleeping in Wales.

Recommendation 18. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers revising its *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* to include further preventative actions that can be taken forward to end rough sleeping in Wales including clear links to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. These actions should be informed by the international evidence base and should have regard to the causes of, and risk factors associated with, rough sleeping.

Housing First

246. We heard that the traditional “staircase” approach to housing people experiencing homelessness is ineffective in supporting a significant number of rough sleepers off the streets.

247. For several years, there have been calls for the Welsh Government to move to a Housing First model, which is viewed as a more desirable and effective alternative to tackling rough sleeping than the “staircase” approach. This was echoed in evidence to us. Until recently, there has been no firm commitment from the Government to do so. However, drawing on the experience of the recently established Housing First pilot projects, the Government acknowledges in the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* that Housing First is an effective solution to rough sleeping and encourages the application of these principles.

248. The *Housing First – National Principles and Guidance for Wales*, published alongside the Action Plan sets out expectations that the Housing First approach will play an increasing role in tackling homelessness, in particular rough sleeping. Taken together, these documents provide a strong indication about the direction of travel. However, we question whether the Guidance goes far enough to ensure the wide scale adoption of Housing First that many respondents called for.

249. The Guidance provides local authorities with considerable discretion over implementation decisions, such as who should be offered a Housing First approach and how widely it should be applied. Given this, we are concerned that some authorities may be more reluctant to develop and implement Housing First models, particularly given the cost implications and where a move away from the “staircase” approach would involve changes to commissioning services. We heard from some respondents that a bolder response is needed; one which assumes that Housing First will be offered as the default approach, unless there is good reason not to. We believe that the Welsh Government should give consideration to this.

Recommendation 19. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers strengthening the *Housing First – National Principles and Guidance for Wales*

to set out an expectation that local authorities should offer Housing First as a default approach to rough sleepers.

250. We acknowledge the strong reservations held by some respondents about the “congregate” model of Housing First, which is referenced in the Guidance. We have not had an opportunity to consider the different Housing First models in detail. However, given the importance of the Guidance in driving forward a successful Housing First approach, we seek assurance that the “congregate” model is a suitable housing solution for rough sleepers in Wales.

Recommendation 20. We recommend that the Welsh Government undertakes an analysis of the “congregate” and “dispersed” Housing First models, drawing on the international evidence base, including that set out in *Crisis’ Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review*, with a view to assessing whether both models are suitable housing solutions for rough sleepers in Wales.

Assertive outreach

251. We acknowledge the variety of outreach support services in operation across many parts of Wales. The level of support provided to help rough sleepers off the street will vary between areas and services.

252. We heard that “assertive outreach”, which actively identifies and reaches out to rough sleepers to offer them a route into suitable accommodation, will significantly reduce rough sleeping. This form of outreach is characterised by persistent and purposeful support, or “stickability”, which we have heard is crucial in providing both housing and non-housing support to rough sleepers, particularly the most entrenched. Assertive outreach should involve multi-disciplinary support, including from health professionals, if it is to be successful. While there are a limited number of assertive outreach services in operation across Wales, Cardiff Council’s Homeless Outreach Team was commended as a positive example.

253. We do not wish to underplay the importance of the various types of street outreach, which offer a lifeline to those in need. However, we believe that the widespread adoption of “assertive outreach” will be key to tackle rough sleeping and support people off the street into suitable accommodation. Given this, we welcome the Welsh Government’s commitment in the Action Plan to promote assertive outreach services and a case management approach to help rough sleepers to secure accommodation.

254. We recognise that for many authorities this will involve a significant change to the way in which existing outreach services are delivered. We believe there is a

role for the Welsh Government, working with its partners, to identify and disseminate best practice models.

Recommendation 21. We recommend that the Welsh Government works with its partners to identify best practice models to deliver assertive outreach support and to reflect this in the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness.

255. We heard that assertive outreach combined with a Housing First approach are a powerful combination in tackling rough sleeping. For this reason, we believe it would be advantageous for the two to be developed and delivered in tandem. We note that the Welsh Government's *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* provides a target date for encouraging the introduction of Housing First of October 2018. However, the target date for the promotion of assertive outreach services is later, in March 2019. We question the rationale for this.

Recommendation 22. We recommend that the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan* sets out an expectation on local authorities and their partners that assertive outreach services should be developed and delivered in tandem with Housing First.

Enforcement

256. We note the various enforcement powers available to the police and local authorities to deal with anti-social behaviour and to ban street begging, including "aggressive begging". It is clear that rough sleeping and begging are often conflated and there is a common misconception that people who are begging are also homeless, and that rough sleepers all engage in begging. We reiterate the evidence from respondents that this is not the case.

257. We heard mixed views about the way in which enforcement powers are being used and the impact of enforcement measures on rough sleepers. We heard some worrying accounts in evidence of the treatment of rough sleepers by some enforcement officers. It is unclear in some of these accounts whether these were police officers, Police Community Support Officers, or local authority enforcement officers. We appreciate that these officers must implement the law and are required to adhere to the highest standards. However, we are concerned that, in some of the accounts we have heard, the approach of individual officers has lacked empathy and sensitivity.

258. We heard that continued cultural and behavioural change is necessary to ensure that rough sleepers are supported off the streets. We do not doubt the negative accounts of interactions between rough sleepers and enforcement

officers that we heard in evidence are the result of the actions of a small minority of officers. Nevertheless, we believe that steps should be taken to address this. We believe that the PATH training programme would enhance the approach of officers to rough sleepers and help bring about behavioural change where it is required.

259. We acknowledge that the Welsh Government is keen to work with the police service in seeking to extend the PATH training programme to the service in Wales, which is to be welcomed. However, we would like to see a firm commitment and more direct action to encourage the uptake of the programme among local authority enforcement officers and Police Community Support Officers.

Recommendation 23. We recommend that the Welsh Government:

- sets out clear expectations that local authority enforcement officers should take part in the PATH training programme; and
- encourages the police service in Wales to engage with the PATH training programme, and to facilitate the uptake of the programme for Police Community Support Officers.

260. We were encouraged to hear that South Wales Police Service has taken the decision to instruct all police officers to make use of their body worn cameras when interacting with rough sleepers. We believe that other police services in Wales should replicate this decision. Using body worn cameras will enable police services to monitor these interactions and provide the necessary assurance that officers' approach to rough sleepers is appropriate and that individuals are afforded dignity and respect. Furthermore, we believe that the footage of these interactions could be a valuable training tool for frontline staff, and we would like the police service to give consideration to this.

Recommendation 24. We recommend that the Welsh Government makes representations to the Police and Crime Commissioners in Wales with a view to encouraging all police forces in Wales to ensure that officers make use of body worn cameras when interacting with rough sleepers.

Diverted giving schemes

261. “Diverted giving” schemes appear to be becoming increasingly common, with the recent introduction of Cardiff’s Give DIFFerently campaign and proposals for schemes in a number of other areas in Wales. These schemes aim to encourage people to donate money to help the homeless rather than to give money directly to people who are begging. While schemes may be framed in a positive way, we heard worrying reports of some that serve to reinforce negative perceptions of people who are begging, and do nothing to challenge the misperception that all rough sleepers engage in begging.

262. The introduction, or proposed introduction, of these schemes has, in some cases, been the subject of media attention and has evoked strong but mixed reactions from the homelessness sector. This was reflected in the evidence we received.

263. We heard that, for some rough sleepers, begging is a means of survival, particularly where their needs are unmet by existing service provision. We also heard that the financial gains may prolong rough sleeping or make returning to the street attractive for those who have managed to secure accommodation. This could be for a variety of reasons, including the need to feed a drug addiction and difficulties in managing on reduced benefits.

264. While we accept “diverted giving schemes” may have a useful role to play, we acknowledge the concerns raised by some respondents, not only about the portrayal of people who beg and of rough sleepers, but about the potential impact of these schemes on those who are in genuine and urgent need of financial assistance.

265. The Action Plan sets out the Welsh Government’s intention to promote a positive message to the public about the best way to support a rough sleeper, and raise awareness of the difference between street based activity (including begging) and those who are actually homeless. There is clearly a role for the Government in raising public awareness and understanding of these issues and so we welcome the Government’s intention in this regard. However, we believe that this should be informed by an evidence base. As such, we believe that further work is needed on the most appropriate and effective way for the public to support rough sleepers, including diverted giving schemes ahead of any public campaign.

266. We believe it will be important to ensure that interventions aimed at harnessing public support for rough sleepers do not have any unintended

consequences. Furthermore, the Welsh Government should send out a clear message that any diverted giving schemes should be motivated by the need to support rough sleepers and be developed in full consultation with the homelessness sector.

Recommendation 25. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers undertaking work to assess the merits of diverted giving schemes and to identify best practice in this area. This should inform any public campaign by the Government to harness support for rough sleepers.

Recommendation 26. We recommend that the Welsh Government sets out clear expectations that any diverted giving schemes should be motivated by the need to support rough sleepers and be developed in full consultation with the homelessness sector.

7. Funding

Evidence from stakeholders

267. The majority of third sector representatives highlighted the lack of long-term, sustainable funding as a potential barrier to preventing and tackling rough sleeping. In addition, there was widespread concern about the future of the Supporting People Programme Grant (SPPG).

268. The Salvation Army emphasised the need for “greater overall stability” if further steps are to be taken to tackle rough sleeping. It stated:

“If we accept that the reasons for the rise in rough sleeping are multifaceted and that the needs of individuals are becoming increasingly complex, posing lasting challenges to their wellbeing, then it is imperative that we create an environment that is capable of supporting people in the long-term. Unfortunately, we believe that the contradiction between the long-term needs of many of those who find themselves rough sleeping and the short-term nature of the current commissioning cycle is antithetical to this aim. It is vital that the Welsh Government shows leadership in resolving this tension.”²²⁰

269. Similar views were expressed by other respondents, including Dr Mackie,²²¹ Llamau,²²² Cymorth Cymru²²³ and CIH Cymru²²⁴. Cymorth Cymru emphasised that “consistency and continuity of funding is absolutely critical...to provide long-term strategic solutions”.²²⁵

7.1. Short-term supported housing

270. CHC,²²⁶ The Salvation Army²²⁷ and Cymorth Cymru²²⁸ referred to the uncertainty associated with the transfer of funding for the housing element of short-term supported housing accommodation to the Welsh Government.

²²⁰ Written evidence, RS15

²²¹ Written evidence, RS11A

²²² Written evidence, RS05

²²³ Written evidence, RS13

²²⁴ Written evidence, RS17

²²⁵ Written evidence, RS13

²²⁶ Written evidence, RS18

²²⁷ Written evidence, RS15

271. Cymorth Cymru emphasised that the housing and support elements of supported accommodation need to be commissioned together and that “one without the other doesn’t work”.²²⁹

7. 2. Future of the Supporting People Programme Grant

272. All third sector respondents and CIH Cymru raised concerns about, or strong objections to, the proposal to merge the SPPG with other housing and non-housing related grants.²³⁰

273. Respondents asserted that the merger would create greater uncertainty, would lead to cuts in funding for the programme, and could increase the number of rough sleepers. As such, there was widespread consensus that the SPPG should remain as a separate, ring-fenced grant.

274. CIH pointed out that, in England, the removal of the ring-fence has led to cuts in the budget line for Supporting People of up to 60%. It therefore “strongly urged the Welsh Government to maintain the ring-fence for the SPPG programme and provide certainty for service providers at an early stage as to not impact the delivery and planning of services locally”.²³¹

275. Cymorth Cymru stated that a ring-fenced SPPG is “vital”. It referred to the Wales Audit Officer (WAO) report, ***How Local Government manages demand - Homelessness, January 2018***, which reported:

“...many [local authorities] state that success in preventing homelessness has only been possible because of the ring fenced grant from the Welsh Government.”

276. The WAO’s report highlighted that, in 15 out of 22 local authority areas, key services required to prevent homelessness, including Supporting People services, are currently unavailable or not available at the necessary level to meet demand.²³²

²²⁸ Written evidence, RS13

²²⁹ RoP, para 556, 8 February 2018

²³⁰ From 2019-20, the Welsh Government proposes to create a single grant that brings together all grants paid to local authorities in support of early intervention, prevention and support. This could include the Supporting People Programme Grant (‘SPPG’), as well as other housing and non-housing related grants. A number of local authorities will be piloting this in 2018-19, with the possibility of further extending the single grant in 2019-20.

²³¹ Written evidence, RS17

²³² Wales Audit Office, ***How Local Government manages demand - Homelessness, January 2018***

277. CHC suggested that the merger proposal should be delayed until after 2020 when the grant funding for the housing element of short-term supported housing will be transferred to the Welsh Government. According to CHC, this “would allow more time to take a strategic approach and look at the funding of supported accommodation as a whole”.²³³

278. The only respondent in favour of the proposed merger of the SPPG was the WLGA. It stated that the Pathfinder pilots “offer the opportunity to ‘do things differently’ and shape services around the needs of some of the most vulnerable in our communities”.²³⁴

Evidence from the Minister

279. The Minister emphasised that no decision has yet been taken about including Supporting People, within a larger grant, but that any such grant would be ring-fenced. Local authorities would therefore not be permitted to use the allocation to fund statutory services.²³⁵

Our view

280. The need for long-term sustainable funding and continued investment in support services for rough sleepers was a key theme in the evidence we received. We heard that the sector is already subject to considerable levels of instability, despite the sizeable amount of funding provided annually through the Supporting People Programme Grant. The Welsh Government has, to date, protected programme funding by ring-fencing the SPPG and has shielded the programme from funding reductions seen in other spending areas. But this may be set to change with the Government’s proposal to merge the SPPG with other housing and non-housing grants.

281. The Supporting People Programme plays a critical role in providing help to some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our communities. It is unsurprising then that third sector organisations, including frontline service providers, are deeply concerned about the merger proposal and the potential impact of this on rough sleeping. We share those concerns.

282. The removal of the ring-fence in England has led to significant reductions in programme funding. While the experience in England is not directly comparable, it highlights the risk for Wales. This, along with reports that the current successful

²³³ Written evidence, RS18

²³⁴ Written evidence, RS01

²³⁵ RoP, para 117, 14 February 2018

approach to homelessness prevention could not have been realised without the grant, and the need for an increase in pace in developing the Supporting People programme (as outlined by the Wales Audit Office), does little to allay our concerns.

283. We acknowledge that the proposed single combined grant will be ring-fenced for the purpose of providing early intervention and support. However, we remain concerned that removing the ring-fence from the SPPG will impede the delivery of vital housing related support services, including those for rough sleepers. We note that the combined grant will extend across two Ministerial portfolios. We question how this will impact on future funding decisions, as well as scrutiny and accountability arrangements.

284. The Action Plan marks a renewed commitment from the Welsh Government to tackle rough sleeping. The Action Plan, along with the Housing First Guidance, also set out expectations that the Housing First approach will play an increasing role in tackling homelessness, in particular rough sleeping. Taking forward these actions within existing budgets will undoubtedly be a challenge for the sector. Given the scale of the challenge, and the increasing levels of rough sleeping, we question whether now is an appropriate time to be considering changes to the funding arrangements of the Supporting People Programme.

285. We note that the final decision on the proposed merger has yet to be taken and will be informed by evidence from the Pathfinders. However, it is unclear when the outcomes of the Pathfinders will be available or whether they will be available in time to inform any decision ahead of the next budget planning round. It is understandable that this uncertainty, along with the uncertainty surrounding the devolution of the housing element of the short-term supported housing funding to Wales, is causing unease among the sector which will be affected by these decisions.

Recommendation 27. We recommend that the Welsh Government, as a matter of urgency, sets a timeline for:

- publishing the findings of its Flexible Funding Pathfinders, and
- its decision on the proposal to merge the Supporting People Programme Grant with other housing and non-housing related grants.

This timeline should take account of the forthcoming devolution of the housing element of short-term supported housing funding to Wales.

Recommendation 28. If the findings of the Flexible Funding Pathfinders show a reduction in funding for the Supported People Programme, or cast doubt on the sector's ability to maintain service delivery at existing levels, we recommend that the Supporting People Programme Grant should remain a separate, ring-fenced grant.

286. On a wider point, regardless of the decision on the merger proposals, we question whether the Action Plan can be delivered within existing resources. We seek assurances from the Minister in this regard.

Recommendation 29. We recommend that the Welsh Government provides further assurances that the Rough Sleeping Action Plan will be adequately resourced, that cross-government funding will be made available, and that funding to ensure the effective implementation of the Plan will be kept under review.