

11 Homelessness

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11.1 About this chapter

This chapter includes the population needs assessment for homeless people. Information about housing needs for each population group is included in the relevant chapter of the population assessment. More information about the health needs of people experiencing homelessness is available in the needs assessment prepared by Public Health Wales (2016).

What is meant by the term homelessness

The legal definition for homelessness' has been set within section 55 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 as a person who:

'has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere which is available for his or her occupation and which that person has a legal right to occupy. A person will be homeless where he or she has accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or where he or she has accommodation that is a moveable structure (such as a caravan or house boat) and there is no place where it can be placed in order to provide accommodation. A person who has accommodation is to be treated as homeless where it would not be reasonable for him or her to continue to occupy it.'

In its revised Code of Guidance for Allocations and Homelessness (2016) Welsh Government have also provided a broader definition and describes homelessness as:

- 'Where a person lacks accommodation or where their tenure is not secure'. This will include people who are:
- sleeping rough
 - living in insecure/temporary housing (excluding assured/assured short-hold tenants)
 - living in short term hostels, night shelters, direct access hostels
 - living in bed and breakfasts
 - moving frequently between relatives/friends
 - squatting
 - unable to remain in, or return to, housing due to poor conditions, overcrowding, affordability problems, domestic violence, harassment, mental, physical and/or sexual abuse, unsuitability for physical needs etc.
 - threatened with losing their home and without suitable alternative accommodation for any reason, e.g. domestic abuse
 - leaving hospitals, police custody, prisons, the armed forces and other institutions or supported housing without a home to go to, required to leave by family or friends or due to relationship

breakdown, within 56 days of the end of tenancy, facing possession proceedings or threat of eviction.'

Policy and legislation

The Housing Act (Wales) 2014 introduced a number of changes to statutory homelessness legislation which were implemented from 27 April 2015 which has led to a greater emphasis on prevention and the relief of homelessness. These have impacted on the way services are provided and recorded. The changes introduced are consistent with the challenges set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 which focuses on improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales and the seven well-being goals for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under Section (10)(1) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Welsh Ministers must publish 46 national indicators ("national indicators") Indicator 34 focuses on homeless services and requires us to measure the 'Number of households successfully prevented from becoming homeless, per 10,000 households'.

11.2 What do we know about the population and services currently provided

Homelessness can arise due to a range of different reasons including family or relationship breakdown, notice from the landlord that the tenancy will not be renewed when it expires (s.21 notice), eviction due to factors such as condition of property and mortgage/rent arrears. Some people facing homeless will already be vulnerable, which may be because they are fleeing domestic abuse, are young, have issues with substance misuse, ex-offending or mental health issues. Some will have co-existing mental health and substance use problems, known as a 'dual diagnosis'. Homelessness can also increase a person's vulnerability. Although some people who seek support, for example, people with a learning disability, older people, people with a physical/sensory disability or mental health issues, may already be known to statutory agencies and may be in receipt of services others may be unknown to them.

While the statutory responsibility for homelessness lies with local authorities, preventing and tackling homelessness often requires a co-ordinated corporate approach and contributions from partner organisations such as; health, criminal justice, housing associations and third sector partners.

Interventions from agencies need to focus on how best to address the three main elements:

- a) **The prevention of homelessness:** including giving appropriate information and advice or signposting applicants to tenancy and crisis support such as: debt counselling, family mediation and housing benefit.
- b) **Identifying suitable accommodation:** including mapping housing supply and demand, securing emergency and other temporary housing and move-on arrangements for people who are or may become homeless.
- c) **Ensuring satisfactory support:** including assessment, provision of Supporting People and other support services, resettlement and outreach work to prevent homelessness where possible,

Collaboration with the NHS, criminal justice and community safety agencies and support services commissioned by Supporting People to meet the needs of people and households who are at risk of homelessness will have a significant impact on how successfully problems can be resolved and how sustainable housing solutions can be.

Table 11.1 shows that there were around 1,200 households in North Wales assessed as homeless in 2015-16.

Table 11.1 Total households assessed as homeless (Section 73), 2015-16

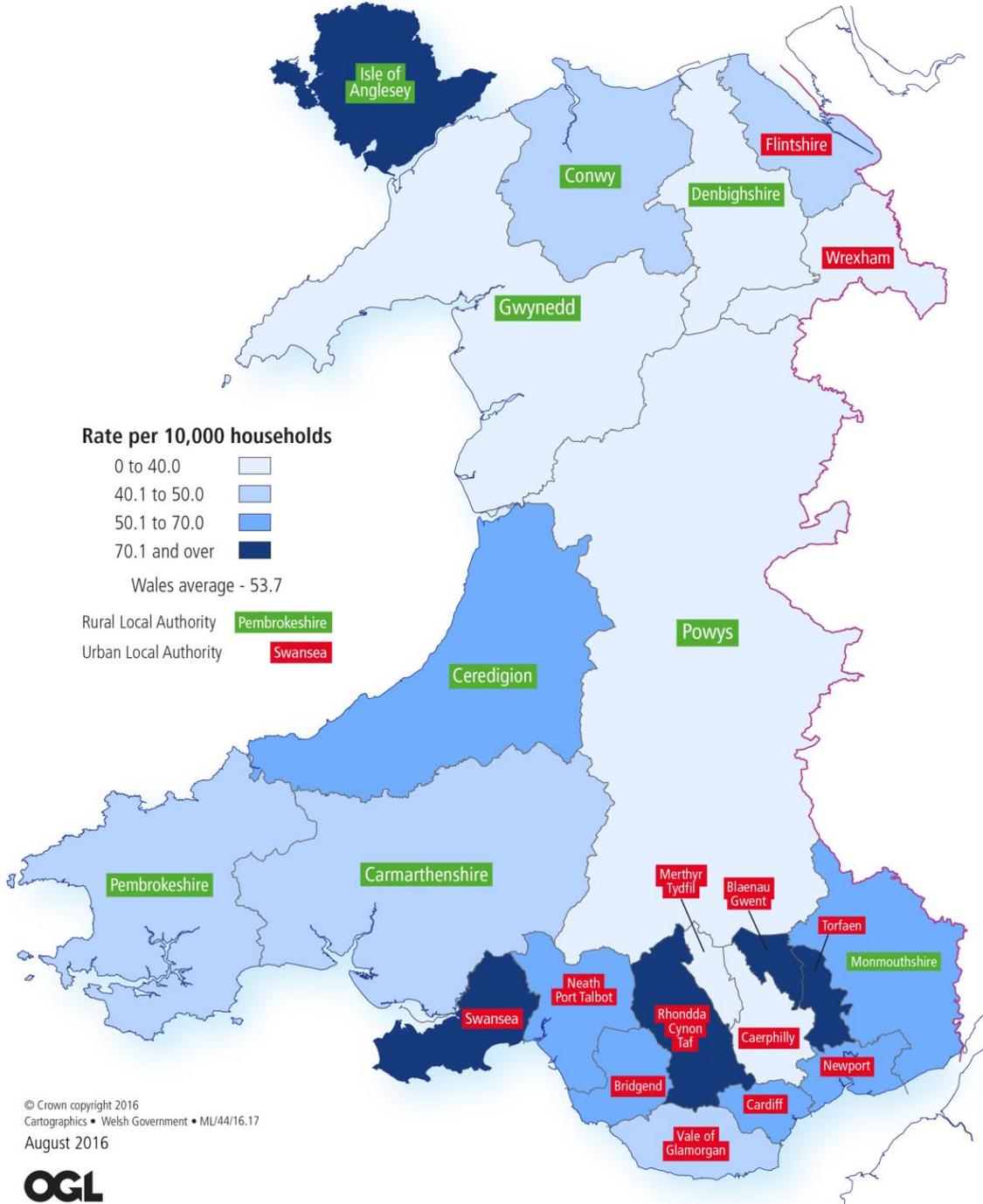
	Households with dependent children	Single person household	Other household groups	Total
Anglesey	15	78	3	96
Gwynedd	45	93	9	150
Conwy	63	228	9	300
Denbighshire	54	198	21	270
Flintshire	36	144	12	190
Wrexham	51	135	6	200
North Wales	260	880	60	1,200

Totals have been rounded and may not sum

Source: Stats Wales

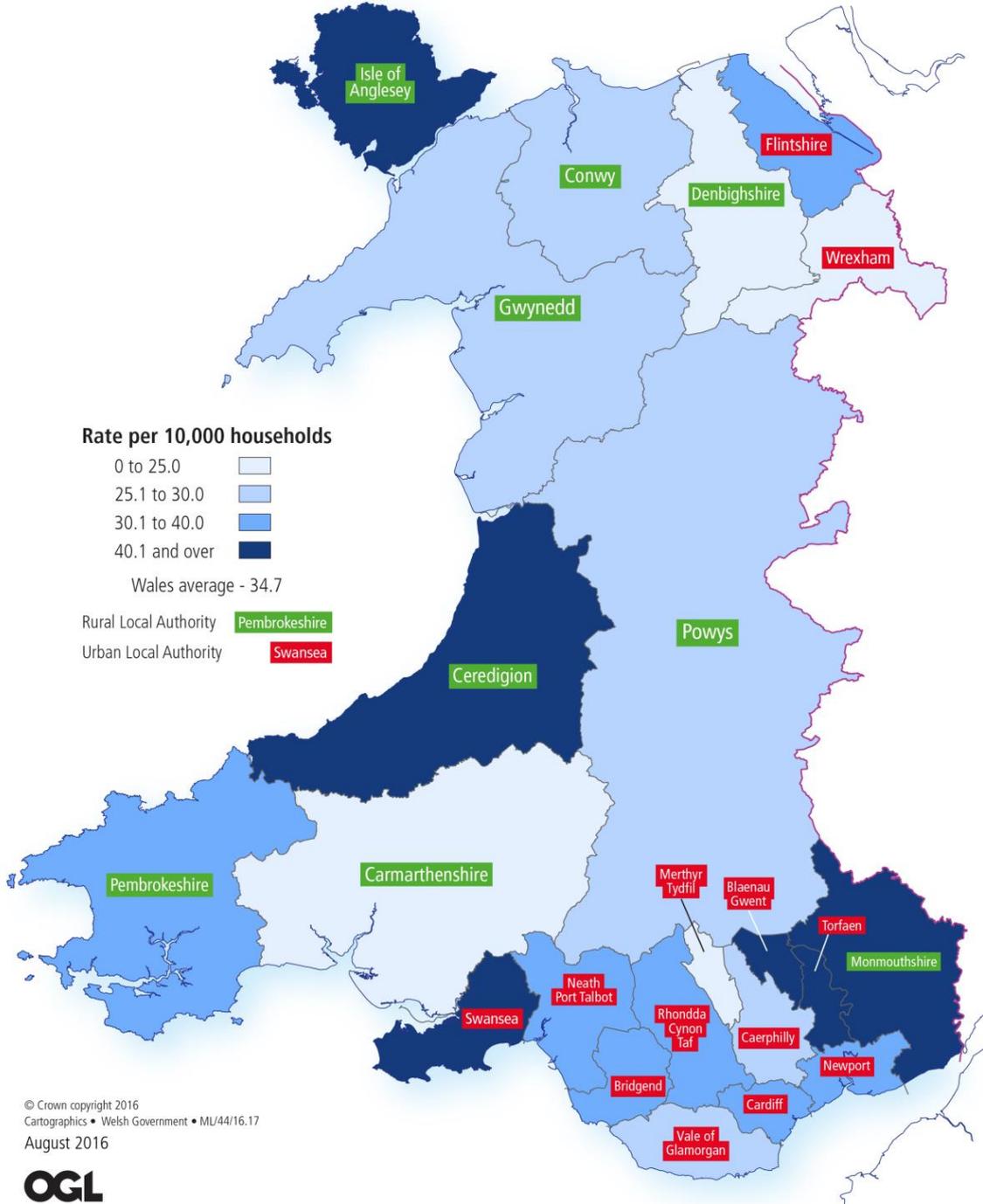
Homelessness

MAP 1: Households found to be eligible and threatened with homelessness (Section 66), 2015-16 - Rate per 10,000 households



Homelessness

MAP 2: Households successfully prevented from homelessness during 2015-16 - Rate per 10,000 households



Homelessness 2015-16

MAP 3: Number of households assessed as homeless (Section 73) -
Rate per 10,000 households

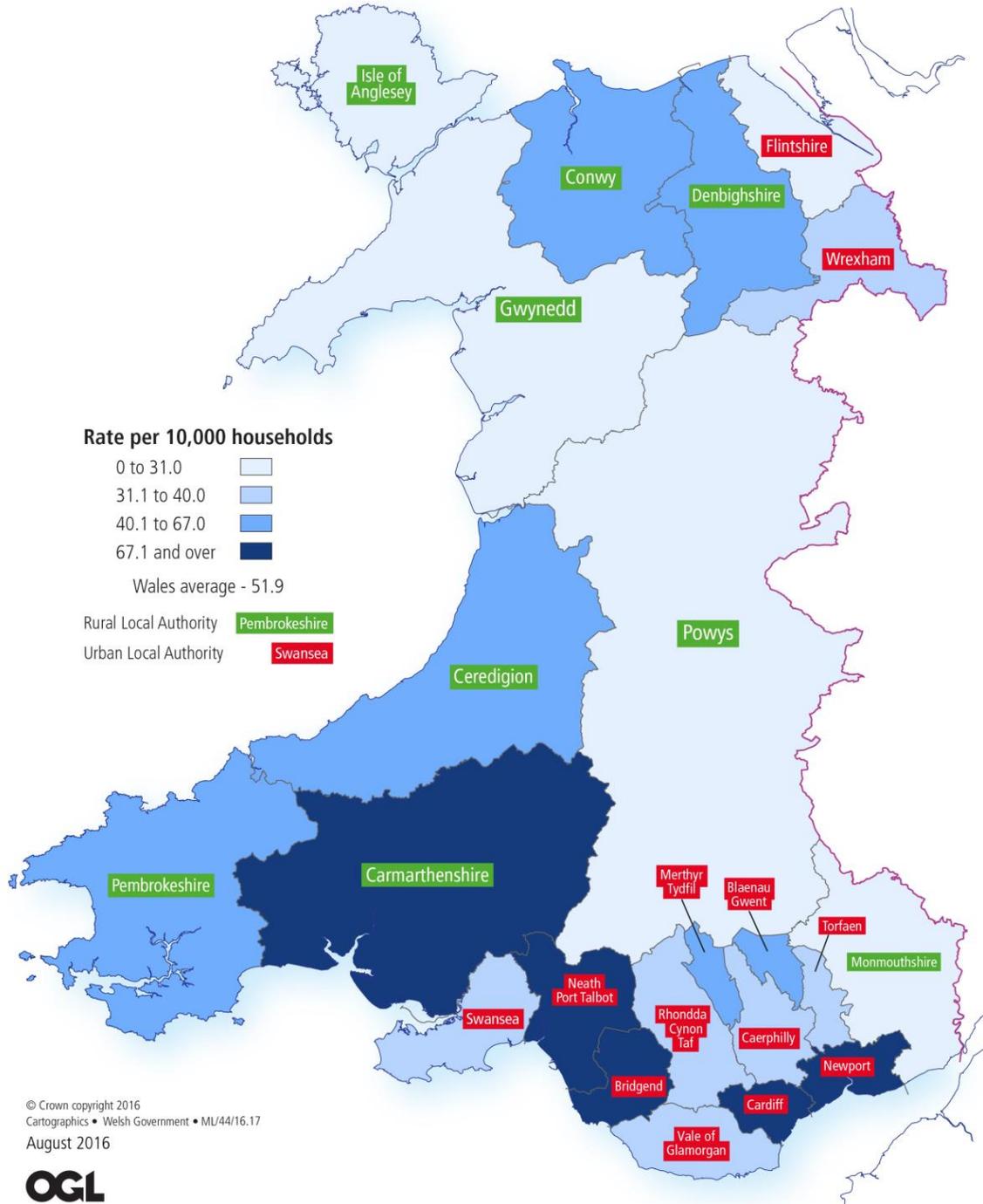


Table 11.2 Percentage of cases where positive action succeeded in preventing (Section 66) or relieving (Section 73 and Section 75) homelessness, 2015-16

	Homelessness successfully prevented % (Section 66)	Homelessness successfully relieved % (Section 73)	Positively discharged % (Section 75)
Anglesey	60	61	100
Gwynedd	85	64	94
Conwy CB	70	40	71
Denbighshire	55	29	80
Flintshire	76	54	100
Wrexham	59	53	100
Wales	65	45	80

Numbers have been rounded

Source: Statutory Homelessness data collection from local authorities

(a) Under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

(b) Successfully prevented refers to the number of households for whom homelessness was successfully prevented for at least 6 months as a percentage of all households assessed as being threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

(c) Successfully relieved refers to the number of households helped to secure accommodation that was likely to last for 6 months as a percentage of households assessed as being homeless under Section 73 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

(d) Positively discharged refers to the number of households provided with suitable accommodation that was likely to last for 6 months as a percentage of households accepted as being eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need and owed a duty to provide accommodation (under Section 75 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014).

Table 11.2 above shows that Gwynedd had both the highest percentage of successful prevention outcomes (Section 66) and of successful homelessness relief outcomes (Section 73) in Wales during 2015-16 at 85 per cent and 64 per cent respectively.

The Isle of Anglesey reported the lowest number of households assessed as homeless at 96 households.

During 2015-16, 9 of the 22 local authorities recorded rates of households threatened with homelessness above the Wales average of 53.7 per 10,000 households.

For households who are assessed as being eligible for assistance, are unintentionally homeless and the Local Authority has a duty to secure accommodation for them (Section 75) the homelessness was positively discharged in 100 per cent of cases across 4 authorities, the Isle of Anglesey, Flintshire, Wrexham and Blaenau Gwent. In 10 of the 22 local authorities the percentage of positive discharge outcomes was above the Wales average of 80 per cent.

Statistical review

Statistical and empirical evidence continues to substantiate the need for more appropriate and affordable accommodation options, as well support services that can help prevent homelessness or make future tenancies sustainable and it is recognised that investment in this area can alleviate pressures and demand upon other agencies.

Typically, the age range most likely to require support from the homeless services is between 16 and 24 years of age. People aged 25 to 40 years of age are the second largest group requiring support, however homelessness can impact people of all ages and different groups within society

Despite recent progress through earlier intervention and support to try and prevent homelessness. Needs mapping indicate that support needs are outstripping supply especially in particular areas and among certain hard to reach groups such as domestic abuse, ex-offenders, young and vulnerable and single people.

There are also variations in the type of demand across the region, for example, street homelessness may be prevalent and noticeable in some communities but not in others. This presents challenges in trying to identify and respond to need which can be quite diverse in nature and can vary between neighbouring communities. Within North Wales there is also the added challenge of delivering some services over a wide geographical area which has different levels of need, where services might need to be supplied in another way, for example, through the medium of Welsh where it is difficult to secure some type of provision without having to travel vast distances.

Supporting People

A large proportion of homeless services in North Wales are delivered or supported with Supporting People funding. The 2015/16 grant allocation for Wales was £124.4 million with North Wales receiving £33.8 million, this makes Supporting People one of the biggest government revenue funds. Since 2012 North Wales has seen a reduction of over £7 million in funding. During 2016/17 the programme received a stand still budget following 3 years of cuts however there is no certainty about future funding which could impact on capacity to deliver services.

Supporting People funding and the retention of the funding has been key to support the preventative agenda by helping alleviate demand upon other statutory services, especially health and social services. The Supporting People Programme Grant (SPPG) Guidance (Wales) 2013 estimates that for each £1 spent on Supporting People £2.38 is saved to the public purse. During 2015/16 the Supporting People Programme supported and helped around 21,000 people

in North Wales find and retain safe suitable accommodation and to remain independently.

Further reductions to the fund could have a domino effect on statutory services and it is vital to ensure effective early intervention to prevent problems escalating to mainstream services and ending up on social services, health or the criminal justice system doorstep.

Table 11.3 Supporting People grant funding 2012 to 2017 (£)

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Anglesey	3,200,000	3,100,000	2,900,000	2,600,000	2,600,000
Gwynedd	6,200,000	5,900,000	5,600,000	5,000,000	5,000,000
Conwy	7,900,000	7,600,000	7,200,000	6,500,000	6,500,000
Denbighshire	6,700,000	6,400,000	6,100,000	5,500,000	5,500,000
Flintshire	7,100,000	6,800,000	6,500,000	5,800,000	5,800,000
Wrexham	6,100,000	5,800,000	5,500,000	5,000,000	5,000,000
North Wales	37,000,000	36,000,000	34,000,000	30,000,000	30,000,000

Numbers have been rounded

11.3 What are people telling us?

While early analysis of the impact of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 show progress and demonstrate that it has been possible to prevent homelessness it is difficult to identify a pattern and reach firm conclusions based on one year of data. Research and experience confirm that some individuals and households who require support lead complex lives and some client groups continue to present real challenges for services. This requires agencies to work closely together to enhance the opportunities to secure permanent and sustainable accommodation options, and it is important that ongoing support is available alongside accommodation. Secure and settled accommodation can enhance opportunities and improve life chances however the provision of accommodation on its own, does not guarantee success.

Transitional grant funding – To facilitate the introduction of the Housing Act transitional grant funding was allocated to support the implementation of the Homelessness provision within the act. This funding has helped local authorities and partners to deliver positive benefits, however the tapering of this funding, which has been targeted at problematic areas, along with the increased amount of paperwork associated with the new legislation may present challenges and it will be difficult to mainstream some of the responses developed without additional resource allocation.

Welfare reform - The introduction of Universal Credit and associated changes to housing benefit allocations are likely to have an adverse impact upon some individuals. There is a danger that some groups within society will become more exposed to the risk of homelessness, especially single individuals under 35 years of age as revised benefit rates will be insufficient to secure appropriate accommodation options in a large number of communities.

Impact on health - Evidence shows that individuals who are homeless are more exposed to poor health and will have a higher reliance and dependency upon other statutory services. Homelessness, or lack of suitable accommodation to return to, has been identified as a contributory factor in some delayed transfer of care cases and it is also known that individuals who are homeless are likely to place higher demand upon other health services including ambulance and A+E admissions (Public Health Wales 2016).

Mental health - Individuals with mental health issues are especially vulnerable and exposed to homelessness. Securing safe secure and affordable housing solutions can be critical in promoting recovery and helping people to integrate into the settled community (Mental Health Network, 2011). Good quality accommodation options can reduce overall demand for health and social care services. Ensuring that people living with mental health problems have a suitable, settled accommodation can aid recovery and help them to engage, connect, learn, and develop the practical life skills required to live well independently with the necessary level of appropriate support. However unsuitable accommodation or lack of support service and response can exacerbate problems and contribute to an increased risk of offending, lack of employment opportunities and lack of social support needs.

New demands

The additional demands arising from the new prison in Wrexham, HMP Berwyn are discussed in chapter 9 *The Secure Estate*.

Findings from engagement with organisations

The issues identified in the survey undertaken for the population assessment were that:

- There is a need for appropriate short and long term help for individuals who find themselves homeless.
- There is a need for support amongst Black & Minority Ethnic people that currently cannot be met by support services such as BAWSO. They are aware of people who have lost their tenancies or have fallen into debt. They recommend the provision of a specialist support.
- One organisation identified a shortage of one bed accommodation across the region. This is especially important with the introduction of the spare

room subsidy and the planned reduction in Housing Benefit for tenants in social housing who are aged under 35.

- There are general concerns around the ability of under 25's to afford accommodation with the welfare reform changes.
- In response to questions about the new emphasis in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act on support from family, friends and the local community, one organisation commented that many homeless people do not have any support from family or friends as the relationships have broken down, which is why they are homeless in the first place.

For more information about the survey please see appendix 1.

Engagement with people experiencing homelessness

As part of the engagement with service users for the population assessment we held a focus group with a group of homeless people and people with substance misuse issues. The feedback from the group included concern services did not understand their needs. For example doctors making assumptions or not listening, housing officers not understanding mental health issues or being 'pigeon-holed' by staff at the Job Centre, the DWP and health services. One person mentioned that travelling to interviews and to work was an issue and another person, with learning difficulties, mentioned the problem in being able to find appropriate training. Managing finances can be difficult when there are issues of substance misuse, or when there are difficulties claiming the right benefits or completing the necessary forms. Finding accommodation can be difficult, particularly if a person is from outside the area. Accessing mental health services can also be difficult. Others mentioned the challenges they face due to health problems, for example sleeping a lot and struggling with social situations due to depression.

People interviewed accessed support from the following services: Arc Communities, the Dawn Centre, Community Psychiatric Nurse, Nacro worker, Cais, Hafal and Aberconwy Mind (including an art project). Friends, family and other community members also provided some support, but there was a comment that about having 'burnt their bridges' with friends and family.

People had mixed views on the quality of support – some said more time was needed, that it felt like a fight to get support, structures change and funding gets pulled. One person said:

'Sometimes your own issues get in the way of accessing help, you don't always know that you need help until it is too late'.

Areas that people needed more help with were accommodation, accessing employment opportunities, taking prescribed medication and substance misuse planning. Referrals to Community Mental Health Teams can take up to

four weeks when sometimes it's not an issue that can wait. People said they needed someone to talk to, to feel listened to and to have continuity of staff.

A member of staff commented:

'Because of universal credit and benefit changes [rent no longer being paid direct to the landlord] there will be a lot more pressure and more people becoming homeless.'

For more information about the engagement activities please see appendix 1.

11.4 Conclusion and recommendations

Information relating to the first year of operation (2015-16 data) suggests that the changes introduced within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 are having a positive effect and that the emphasis on earlier intervention and prevention are delivering better conclusions for individuals, however significant challenges remain. It is possible that some of the initial progress will be tempered if the transitional funding allocated is removed.

We must also be mindful of the impact which changes within other services, can have on homelessness, and similarly the impact which homeless people can have on other services. Welfare reform and especially changes to Housing Benefit and the introduction of Universal Credit are expected to increase demand upon some services, especially from certain groups in the community, such as young people, which will create new challenges. It is therefore paramount that we try and concentrate on identify ways of maximising value and consider how we can combining effort and resources and focus on the preventative approach to homelessness, which can help deliver positive outcomes to vulnerable people and hopefully avoid the need for more intensive and costly interventions .

Key messages

Changes to the welfare benefits – The impact of the proposed changes to the welfare benefits, especially those allocated towards housing related costs are yet to be calibrated with the system. It is projected that some individuals and groups will experience significant reductions in the funding for assistance towards housing and it will become more difficult to secure appropriate and suitable accommodation options at these reduced levels. Some of the groups most adversely impacted, correlate quite closely with groups who are currently known to be more exposed and vulnerable to homelessness. There are also concerns that the introduction of Universal Credit -which compounds all benefit payments and does not automatically allow transfer of the rent element to the landlord could lead to problems. Research from areas who have introduced universal credit are reporting higher level of arrears which could over time become problematic and impact on the sustainability of tenancies.

Regional Commissioning - While the aim will be to deliver the vast majority of homeless services as close as possible to an individual's original community and where possible within local authority boundaries, it will be necessary to plan and deliver some homelessness services regionally. Where it is not possible or cost effective to respond to needs locally we will use long-term strategic partnerships such as the Regional Collaborative Committee and local planning groups to consider housing need and priorities across local authority areas.

Out of Area Placements – Most vulnerable people seeking support tend to be non-transient, staying within their locality rather than moving from one area to another. However some movement across boundaries does occur and is sometimes necessary to support individuals and to facilitate rehabilitation. Legislation and best practice would suggest that out of county placements should be exceptional, and based upon considerations such as personal and public safety. Where such cases arise, cross border co-operation as well as the maintenance of service users existing support networks need to be discussed at the earliest possible stage.

Shared Responsibility - Housing Associations and third sector support providers who have experience of delivering services to particular vulnerable groups will have an important role in assisting the efforts of statutory organisations. There will be a continuing need to provide support services that complement the statutory sector, as we anticipate a steady increase in population up to 2020.

Gaps in service / support

- Lack of single person accommodation
- Limited hostel provision
- Shortage of specialist provision for individuals with ongoing medical conditions
- Gaps in support services

Equality and human rights

This chapter recognises that while homelessness is not in itself a protected characteristic, that many people who are homeless can be identified as having protected characteristics and as a result can be disproportionately impacted and face increased vulnerability and/or risk.

This chapter highlights data that indicates disproportionate impacts with regard to age and ethnicity. Specifically highlighting that typically, the age range most likely to require support from the homeless services is between 16 and 24 years of age. People aged 25 to 40 years of age are the second largest group requiring support. The chapter identifies that there is a need for support for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people with housing issues. It also discusses

the additional vulnerabilities people may have, for example, a learning disability, older people, people with a physical/sensory disability, substance misuse and/or mental health issues

There are other protected characteristic groups that may also be impacted due to homelessness. There is more information needed about the needs of Welsh language speakers, for example. The Equalities Impact Assessment reflects on further considerations and impacts. Issues affecting people with the protected characteristics not picked up by this assessment and could be addressed in future population assessment reviews, in the development of the area plan or in the services developed or changed in response to the area plan.

Services supporting homelessness must take a person-centred approach that takes into account the different needs of people with protected characteristics and this will be a continued approach during the development of future implementation plans and play a key role on the development of services.

We would welcome any further specific evidence which may help to inform the final assessment.

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