

People, homes and services

A regional approach to tackling homelessness in North Wales

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Foreword

When, as a group, we initially discussed what the title for this strategy should be, there was a tacit recognition that addressing homelessness across the region was more than simply increasing the supply of the right type of housing.

Yes, the shortage of supply is a big contributing factor to people presenting as homeless, whether they are rough sleepers, those on social housing waiting lists, or those sleeping on a friend's sofa without any prospect of any affordable permanent accommodation.

But all the evidence from the individual homelessness reviews, carried out by the six North Wales local authorities to inform this strategy, suggests a more complex explanation as to why so many are sleeping rough or waiting to be housed.

It is about the specific groups of people in need of support, the type of homes we need to provide them with and the services that allow them to live sustainably in those homes – **People, Homes and Services.**

Common themes emerged around the types of demographics presenting as homeless, particularly young people, those with complex needs such as mental health issues, and those leaving prison.

The reviews also identified common themes around the gaps in the type of accommodation, as well as the gaps in data to inform a strategic approach to combatting the issue.

Finally, commonality across the region emerged on other root causes such as welfare reform, lack of early intervention and a lack of collaboration with the health service, and in some cases between council service areas.

Fundamentally, this strategy recognises that homelessness, and the issues that cause it, has no regard for local authority boundaries and that if we are really going to address this issue, then all six councils need to work together to join up data, services and solutions.

This document sets out a strategy based on working together to reach the overarching goal – eradicating homelessness in North Wales.

Matt Dicks
Director, CIH Cymru

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1. Introduction

1.1 Legislative background:

Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a statutory duty on each local authority in Wales to carry out a homelessness review and formulate a homelessness strategy. A homelessness strategy, under section 50 of the Act, is a strategy for achieving the following objectives in the local housing authority's area:

- The prevention of homelessness;
- That suitable accommodation is and will be available for people who are or may become homeless;
- That satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless.

1.2 Additional legislative and regulatory considerations:

When preparing this strategy partners have referred to and taken into account the following:-

- 10 Year Homeless Plan
- National Housing Pathway for Ex-Service Personnel
- National Pathway for Homelessness Services to Children, Young People and Adults in the Secure Estate
- Preventing Homelessness and Promoting Independence: A Positive Pathway to Adulthood
- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2015
- Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016
- Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and Population Needs Assessment
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Assessment of Wellbeing
- Regional Strategic Plans
- Equalities Act (Wales) 2010
- Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations 2014
- Code of Guidance to Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness, 2016
- Welfare Benefit Reforms

1.3 Key objectives:

The aim of this strategy is to address the root causes of homelessness, whether that be rough sleeping, reducing the numbers on the social housing waiting list, reducing the "numbers of "sofa surfers", and any other type of homelessness, with the ultimate goal of ending it altogether in North Wales. After carrying out a Homelessness Review in each local authority areas, the six authorities across the region will meet that goal by achieving the following key objectives:

- **Developing a regional approach to tackling homelessness in North Wales**
- **Sharing best practice across the region**
- **Developing shared services and collaboration where possible**
- **Developing a better understanding of the causes of homelessness through better data capture across the region**
- **Reducing homelessness in North Wales**

1.4 the North Wales homelessness picture

This was the picture of homelessness in North Wales in July 2018:

Number on household
Waiting List in North Wales:

7,022



75%

of Welsh people think Welsh
Government should house
rough sleepers



509

in temporary
accommodation

84

sleeping rough



Two-thirds

of Welsh people believe Welsh Government
should provide a good quality home to everyone



2. The regional approach

2.1 Background

The Williams Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery, which reported in 2014, noted that:

“The public sector relationships in Wales are overly complex and this complexity does not serve Wales well. The structures, relationships and responsibilities of public sector bodies in Wales, and the partnerships between them, must be streamlined, accountability clarified and synergies maximised.”

And that:

“There is a need for a step change in the performance and delivery of public services in Wales.”

The Commission also recommend the reduction in the number of councils in order to streamline the delivery of public services in Wales. Whilst the Welsh Government has stopped short of reorganisation, a collaborative approach has continued to dominate its agenda in terms of the delivery of public services since the commission published its report.

In June 2017, the Heads of Housing of the six North Wales local authorities, together with the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, undertook a commitment to work together to develop a regional homelessness strategy.

A working group was established and communication opened with the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government agreed to the regional approach outlined in the document in **Appendix A**, provided that each of the six local authorities in the region “adopts/signs up to the regional strategy”.



2.2 Key shared themes and objectives

The local reviews have been carried out and common themes and key areas for action have been identified across the region:



2.2.1 People

Key issues

Youth homelessness

Ensuring correct information is provided to young people via different social media platforms

Misunderstanding/lack of knowledge of service provision amongst young people

The impact on young people and their housing needs, when family life reaches crisis point

Clarifying what we mean by young people and understanding the needs of different groups of young people such as 16-17 year olds in B&B, 20-35 year-olds in one-bed accommodation - a lack of understanding as to why different groups are presenting as homeless

Failure to identify at-risk young people at an earlier stage - e.g. vulnerable people/ACES agenda - and a need to provide more joined up services, e.g children services not communicating with housing at an earlier stage

Shortage of shared accommodation and one-bed accommodation

Shortage of right type of accommodation

Many young people aren't tenancy ready - i.e. not financially literate, not experienced living independently

Rough sleepers

Numbers are growing

Shortage of the right type of accommodation e.g. emergency accommodation

Uncoordinated charity approach across locality and region e.g. good work having unintended consequences that cause issues further along the housing journey at a local and regional level

Addressing the "drug and alcohol culture" - a proportion don't use their accommodation because of drug culture. Drug users less likely to use emergency shelter accommodation

Lack of support for people with mental health issues
Uncertainty about the future of Supporting People funding

<p>Complex needs</p>	<p>Lack of a clear definition of what Complex Needs mean</p> <p>Lack of co-ordination in service provision</p> <p>Lack of adaptive housing and coordinated use of resource across region</p> <p>Welsh Government commitment to Supporting People Programme</p>
<p>Prison leavers</p>	<p>Prisoner Pathway - not enough resource</p> <p>Lack of collaboration across region</p> <p>No longer within Priority Need</p> <p>Lack of suitable accommodation for those convicted of arson</p>

2.2.2 Homes

Key issues

<p>Housing first</p>	<p>Shortage of funding</p> <p>Lack of Clarity from Welsh Government in terms of its housing first strategy and what it means - is it a health and/or housing spend?</p> <p>Lack of political appetite at a local level in certain Local Authority areas</p>
<p>Improved access to accommodation - supply</p>	<p>Under 35s accommodation</p> <p>Perceived unwillingness of Private Rented Sector (PRS) to take tenants on welfare benefits</p> <p>Lack of housing support for tenants in PRS</p> <p>Upfront letting agency fees</p>

Temporary accommodation

- People unable to move on
- Shortage of right type accommodation
- Too expensive
- Continual risk assessments required

2.2.3 Services

Key issues

Prevention/ intervention

- Intervention takes place at crisis point - homelessness is a symptom not the cause
- Lack of holistic approach to prevention across Local Authority departments - it's every department's responsibility to prevent homelessness

Welfare reform

- Implementation of Welfare Reform agenda

Health

- Lack of collaboration and services in locality and at a regional level
- Lack of understanding of housing within health sector



3. The collaborative framework

3.1 The strategic aim

The core strategic commitment from the six local authorities in North Wales is to create a culture of better collaboration across the region, in terms of addressing the specific issues causing homelessness as outlined above. That agenda will be cemented into the strategic approach of each authority by adoption of the Regional Homelessness strategy as set out in this document. Each authority will develop its own local action plan based on the priorities of the regional strategy and this section outlines where collaboration can take place at a regional level.

3.2 Collaborative work plan

Based on the correlation of key themes, key areas of collaboration across the region have been identified:

3.2.1 People

Youth homelessness:

- Develop a regional approach for young people in terms of information on:
 - Being tenancy ready
 - Financial literacy Welfare/Benefits
 - Promoting a Young People's Positive Pathway to Housing
- Creating better links between accommodation and employment opportunities
- Creating the right support and prevention tools to help maintain tenancies

Rough sleepers:

- Create a regional charity liaison hub to improve consistency and strategic delivery of support
- Promote Streetlink App and Information on reporting homelessness and how public can assist homeless people
- Change perceptions of politicians and public in relation to stereotypes in terms of emergency accommodation, shared accommodation and housing first
- Pulling data sets together at a regional level to create a better understanding of:
 - Why people refuse certain types of accommodation
 - Why tenancies end/Why people present as homeless
 - What PRS want in terms of support and how can we encourage landlords to let to Welfare Benefit claimants
- Develop better engagement with rough sleepers to understand need

Complex needs:

- Develop definitive and shared definition of complex needs across region
- Coordinate use of research across region and individual local authorities in terms of data on complex needs
- Develop/utilise right type of housing
- Develop better collaboration across local authority departments around complex needs

Prison leavers:

- Increase resource for Prisoner Pathway by developing a reciprocal agreement across region - creation of regional Prisoner Pathway network of officers
- Improve monitoring of Prisoner Pathway and develop a data map of impact it's having across region

3.2.2 Homes

Housing First:

- Joined up communications approach to persuade local politicians of the merits of Housing First
- Feed into on-going Welsh Government roll out programme to better understand WG vision
- Share best practice across region

Improved access to accommodation - supply:

- Raise awareness of Homelessness Strategy with other departments
- Embedding homelessness at a strategic level across the region
- Increasing supply that is suitable and accessible
 - o Social new build
 - o Utilising more PRS stock
- Develop a suite of incentives across the region to encourage landlords to work with Homelessness Service
- Working with PRS to reduce negative perception of taking on Welfare Benefit tenants
- Regionalising comms approach with PRS landlords
- Further promote Tai Teg web portal

Temporary accommodation:

- Explore innovative solutions to temporary accommodation
- Learning from Local Authorities that don't use bed and breakfast accommodation to meet temporary accommodation needs - sharing best practice across the region
- Communications campaign to address public perceptions of temporary accommodation and the people that use it
- Explore a regional service level agreement with bed and breakfast providers

3.2.3 Services

Prevention/intervention:

- Create cross-regional data set to better inform why people present as homeless
- Raising awareness amongst statutory services within local authorities to understand that earlier intervention can prevent future homelessness
- Create a regional map of the prevention tools available at both a local and regional level
- Share information services across the region
- Sharing training resource across the region

Welfare reform:

- Develop a regional early intervention hub
- Set up a regional best practice group
- Plug data gaps to better understand the impact of sanctions on homelessness
- Regionalise pre-eviction protocols

Health and social care:

- Better demonstrate cost-benefit of investment in housing and homelessness agenda in terms of savings to health service through sharing of best practice
- Creating a louder voice for housing on Public Service Boards



4. Outcomes

The ultimate aim of this strategy is to reduce homelessness and work towards its eradication across North Wales, measured against an evaluation system (see section 5 below).

5. Monitoring and evaluation

A Regional Homelessness Delivery group has been set-up to implement the regional strategy and action plan. The group is made up of the Housing Strategy leads from the 6 Local Authorities and will meet once a quarter. Where necessary sub-groups will be set-up to deliver some of the actions, membership of the sub-groups will include the relevant partners and frequency of the meetings will be determined by the group.

The progress made against the Regional Action Plan (Appendix B) will be presented quarterly to each Local Authority (LA) Strategic Housing Partnership which oversees the implementation of the LAs Local Housing Strategy and related strategies. The role of the LA Strategic Housing Partnership is to co-ordinate and strengthen housing related activities across all services and partner organisations.

An annual report will be prepared detailing the progress made against the regional action plan and each Local Authority will present the report to their Economy and Plan Scrutiny Committee. The LA will also include progress made against the local Action Plan within the report and will ensure it is publically available online on the LA's website.

Appendix A

Outline - North Wales regional homelessness strategy

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has introduced the most fundamental changes to homelessness legislation since the introduction of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Alongside the ground breaking statutory duty linked to the prevention of homelessness, the Act also introduced, for the first time, a statutory duty upon a local housing authority to undertake a Homelessness Review and to produce a Homelessness Strategy, with the strategy being published by the end of 2018.

Should the North Wales local authorities produce individual Homelessness Strategies; these would contain similar aims and objectives. Therefore, the North Wales Heads of Housing recommended that the six North Wales local authorities work together to collectively produce and publish a Regional Homelessness Strategy.

CIH Cymru agreed to act as facilitator for the project and met with project leads from the local authorities on 25 October to develop an approach and work plan.

The benefits of such a strategy could include:

- The potential for local authorities to collaboratively procure and deliver homelessness services will be enhanced. There will also be increased opportunity for the development of more effective working with key partner organisations, such as, Health Service, i.e., who operate on a regional basis.
- There will be a more consistent approach among local authorities with their interpretation and implementation of the homelessness legislation, i.e., reasonable steps, and in the delivery of homelessness services across the North Wales locality. This will help to reduce the potential for variation in the availability and delivery of services across the region.
- Local authorities will be able to develop a broader and more detailed understanding of regional issues, better understanding issues neighbouring authorities are encountering.
- There will be more opportunities for authorities to share their resources and expertise and specialist services. It was also recognised that there would be improved collaboration amongst local authorities, for example, with the management of MAPPA cases.
- Establishing a collective understanding and regional approach towards preventing/ tackling homelessness will result in local authorities, together with their partners, having a stronger, more positive influence on the development of future Welsh Government policy, particularly, around housing, homelessness and supporting people issues.

Approach:

- Each council will undertake local reviews and develop local action plan
- The local plans will be analysed, and common themes and areas of cooperation will be identified to develop a draft regional strategy and action plan
- Consult on draft regional strategy and action plan (politically and cross sector)
- Publish final regional strategy and action plan



Appendix B – Regional Action Plan

Theme	Action	Task	Output
People Youth Homelessness	Develop a consistent approach across North Wales to support young people to: (1) Become tenancy ready. (2) Maintain their tenancy	Map out existing services available to support young people in each County. Gather information from the Single Pathway (and any other methods available) to identify the demand for support services in each County. LAs to share existing referral processes with partners to maximise the use of services available and good practice examples. Identify areas for collaboration.	Each LA will offer robust personal plans for young people that include support to access training and employment opportunities and resolve any debt and management money issues prior to an offer of a tenancy.
	Rough Sleepers	Deliver a consistent service across North Wales that responds to rough sleepers	Train front line officers on how to develop effective personal plans for young people. Develop a regional communication plan to promote Street Link. Develop a regional engagement toolkit to improve communication with rough sleepers to better understand their needs. Each LA to develop local outreach services based on local need and share good practice to ensure consistent approach.

Theme	Action	Task	Output
Complex needs	Develop a coordinated approach to responding to customers with complex needs.	<p>Agree what the definition of complex needs is across the region.</p> <p>Share data and good practice.</p> <p>Identify areas for collaboration.</p> <p>Train front line officers on how to respond to customers with complex needs and ensure the right support services are in place.</p>	The complex needs of customers will be met.
Prison leavers	Continue to provide Housing Solutions to prison leavers prior to release maximising opportunities to work in collaboration to ensure effective use of resources.	<p>Develop a reciprocal agreement across the region.</p> <p>Share monitoring data and develop a data map of the impact it is having across the region.</p>	Increase the resources for Prisoner Pathway
Homes	In collaboration use innovation to respond to the accommodation needs of customers.	<p>Share data and good practice.</p> <p>Identify areas for collaboration</p>	Implement a successful approach to Housing First in each local authority area.
Improved access to accommodation	Develop a regional approach to improve the access to the private rented sector	Develop a consistent approach to landlord incentive schemes across the region.	Improve the access to accommodation in the private rented sector.
Temporary accommodation	Explore innovative solutions regionally to reduce the cost of temporary accommodation.	<p>Share data and good practice.</p> <p>Identify areas for collaboration</p>	Reduced costs for LAs.

Theme	Action	Task	Output
<p>Services</p> <p>Prevention</p>	<p>Deliver a consistent service across North Wales that responds to the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.</p>	<p>Map out prevention tools available at both a local and regional level.</p> <p>Train frontline officers on prevention tools available.</p>	<p>Better understanding of why people are presenting as homeless.</p>
<p>Mitigation of Welfare Reform</p>	<p>Develop a collaborative approach to reducing the impact of Welfare Reform on working age claimants affected by Universal Credit</p>	<p>Set-up a regional best practice group and share data to better understand the impact of WR (including the impact of sanctions) and develop effective mitigation measures.</p> <p>Regionalise pre-eviction protocols.</p>	<p>Reduce the impact on customers and public services.</p>
<p>Health and Social Care</p>	<p>Develop closer working arrangements with Health Services</p>	<p>Identify areas for collaboration.</p>	<p>Create the links between health and housing.</p>