

Evidence to Equality, Communities and Local Government Committee – ministerial scrutiny session on the rough sleeping action plan March 2019

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for homeless people. We work in England, Scotland and Wales providing support for homeless people and campaigning for change. Our team in South Wales provides education, training and support for homeless people. We carry out research to understand homelessness in Wales and campaign for the changes needed to end it for good.

Summary

The ongoing need for anyone to sleep rough on the streets of Wales – and the UK as a whole - indicates an unacceptable societal failure. Recent homelessness projection figures for Crisis suggest that the scale of rough sleeping and some other forms of homelessness has worsened over the past decade. However, Crisis has set out how homelessness can be ended for good in the three nations of Great Britain by governments taking the right policy choices – in our report *Everybody In: how to end homelessness in Great Britain*.¹ There are specific challenges in Wales in relation to rough sleeping, but there are also significant opportunities for the new Welsh Government leadership to take a lead in ending it, drawing on the best evidence about what works.

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¹ Downie, M., Gousy, H., Basran, J., Jacob, R., Rowe, S., Hancock, C., Albanese, F., Pritchard, R., Nightingale, K. and Davies, T. (2018) *Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain*. London: Crisis. <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/international-plans-to-end-homelessness/everybody-in-how-to-end-homelessness-in-great-britain-2018/>

Crisis' suggestions for areas of enquiry

1. The Minister's views on improving the current ways we measure rough sleeping.
2. If the Minister will make steps to commit to a target date for ending rough sleeping as the first step towards ending homelessness more generally through prevention and rapid rehousing.
3. If the Minister will ensure that she will consider the housing needs of people affected by homelessness as part of her response to the affordable housing supply review.
4. In advance of the priority need review reporting, what steps the Minister is considering to relax priority need tests for groups identified in the committee's recommendations last year as a step towards abolishing it entirely.
5. If the Minister has discussed a 'duty to prevent' with ministerial colleagues as a way to help prevent homelessness from state institutions, such as prisons, hospitals, and the care system, and the impact that homelessness has on those policy areas.
6. How the Minister plans to change commissioning arrangements to help scale-up Housing First, including longer commissioning terms to aid planning and working beyond housing, especially with health.
7. If the Minister has reflections on the current state of discussion about rough sleeping and homelessness in Wales and how Welsh Government will encourage a more humane debate on homelessness, focused on solutions and the dignity of those affected.

1. Scale of rough sleeping and sleeping in cars, tents and on public transport

Research commissioned by Crisis, and undertaken by Heriot-Watt University, shows that between 2012 and 2017 the number of people sleeping rough in Wales increased by 75% and the number sleeping in cars, tents and on public transport increased by 50%.

This research includes updated figures for 2017 from a wider dataset of 'core homelessness' figures, which also includes other common forms of homelessness, such as being in unsuitable temporary accommodation, sofa surfing, and people in shelters and refuges. Core homelessness refers to households who are considered homeless at any point in time due to the most acute forms of homelessness (or living in short-term or unsuitable accommodation).²

² Bramley, G. (2017) Homelessness projections: Core homelessness in Great Britain, London: Crisis. <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/types-of-homelessness/homelessness-projections-core-homelessness-in-great-britain-2017/>

See full definition of core homelessness and the data table for rough sleeping and sleeping in cars, tents and public transport at the end of this paper.

Crisis' research is based on the trends observed through the rough sleeping count but looks to provide a more comprehensive picture by using multiple data sources. The analysis uses a technique which calculates the number of people experiencing different types of homelessness on any one night during the year, so it differs from the rough sleeper counts that are conducted over single points in time in the winter.

The research uses wider data sources and so it identifies those people who are missing from the count numbers. For each household or individual captured in the dataset by year we know the duration of their homelessness and the average time they have experienced each type of homelessness (including rough sleeping and sleeping in cars, tents and public transport). For example, someone may have experienced both rough sleeping and living in a hostel in any given year. In capturing this information the analysis is able to remove double counting from the figures and therefore the research presents a point in time figure for any given night in each year.

The estimate for the number of people living in cars, tents and public transport are based on levels of rough sleeping in Great Britain and has been calculated in relation to a study by Anna Clarke et al (2015) estimating the scale of youth homelessness.³ This research estimated that the number who reported staying in cars, tents or public transport was approximately double the number reporting core rough sleeping (i.e., streets, parks, car parks), but the average duration was around half that estimated for core rough sleeping from other sources and therefore the stock or point-in-time figure is similar to rough sleeping levels.

2. Commitment to targets to end rough sleeping as a first step to ending all common forms of homelessness through prevention and rapid rehousing

Crisis believes the Welsh Government's action plan is missing an overarching target date by which Welsh Government would like to see an end to rough sleeping as a step towards ending other common forms of homelessness through effective prevention and rapid rehousing.

³ Clarke, A., Burgess, G., Morris, S. and Udagawa, C. (2015) Estimating the scale of youth homelessness in the UK: Final report. Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, https://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2014/Estimating-the-scale-of-youth-homelessness-in-the-UK/Report/copy_of_Full-Report

There is a strong link between rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness: people often experience other forms of homelessness before becoming street homeless; and around half of people who are homeless have three or more experiences of being homeless.⁴ These other forms include being trapped in temporary accommodation without a plan to move on, sofa-surfing, or leaving state institutions to no fixed address.

Crisis recommends Welsh Government makes a commitment to end all forms of homelessness as a matter of urgency and to put in place an action plan to deliver on this commitment. Crisis' plan to end homelessness showed how governments can make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring and included an inclusive definition of 'homelessness' that is wider than just the visible forms, such as rough sleeping. Homelessness is made rare through effective homelessness prevention. We cannot prevent all cases of homelessness but when people lose their homes they need a rapid rehousing approach (homelessness is brief) to get into safe and secure accommodation in houses/flats in ordinary communities with the right kind of support that enables people to sustain their accommodation (homelessness is non-recurring).

The Welsh Government action plan identifies as a "long-term objective" ending the need for people to sleep rough. This plan overlaps with the end of the ten-year homelessness plan (2009-2019) that brought about many advances, including the prevention approach that has inspired similar work in England.

This is an urgent challenge. Committee members will be aware of the recent, visible increases in rough sleeping and other street-based activity. We know from evidence that people rough sleeping can be at risk of earlier death than the wider population⁵, can suffer greater harm to their health, and are much more likely to be victims of anti-social behaviour than the general public.⁶

There is very strong international evidence that one of the features of a successful rough sleeping support system is swift action to prevent or quickly end street homelessness through rapid rehousing. This reduces the number of people sleeping rough who develop complex needs or become entrenched in the situation.⁷ Crisis would like to see Welsh Government leading the system change needed to bring about a rapid rehousing approach along with homelessness prevention that reduces the number of people and households needing rehousing in the first place.

⁴ Mackie, P. & Thomas, I. (2014) Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain. London: Crisis.

⁵ Office of National Statistics (2018) Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2013 to 2017. Office of National Statistics: London

⁶ Thomas, B (2012), Homelessness Kills. Crisis: London.

⁷ Mackie, P., Johnsen, S., and Wood, J. (2017) Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review. Crisis: London

3. Measures to increase access to housing and support

Responding to the latest rough sleeping count figures, the Minister for Housing and Local Government, Julie James AM, said there was a need for “strategies to get people into decent, secure accommodation as fast as possible and not the temporary fixes that we know don’t work”.⁸ Crisis agrees with this rapid rehousing aim and would like to see plans brought forward as soon as possible to realise the aim.

The affordable housing supply review will be a key moment for Welsh housing and homelessness policy as the supply of good quality homes in a range of areas, with a choice of tenure types, is one of the foundations of reducing and ending homelessness through prevention and rapid rehousing. Housing supply is an issue that is going beyond party political boundaries with policy papers and strategies from Welsh Conservatives⁹ and Plaid Cymru consulting¹⁰ as well as the current Welsh Government review. We are pleased to see this, given the long-term nature of the solutions needed to address the housing backlog in Wales.

There is widespread evidence that Wales (and other parts of the UK) need many more homes at social rent levels. Crisis’ evidence is that building 4,000 social rent homes a year for 15 years will meet the backlog of housing need for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and for people on lower incomes (Wales also needs housing for other types of tenure, such as private rented sector).¹¹

4. The review of priority need

The current priority need tests are barriers for people who are deemed ineligible for rehousing. Crisis recommends Welsh Government brings about the vision of every person being provided with the housing support they need – whether to prevent their homelessness or to rapidly rehouse them if they do become homeless. Priority need is a barrier to achieving this, so Crisis recommends it is phased out for all people in line with the committee’s recommendations in the report, *Life on the Streets: preventing and tackling rough sleeping in Wales* (2018). Scotland abolished priority need in stages and, while only part of the solution, it would make a significant difference in preventing and ending homelessness.

⁸ Full citations on Crisis website, <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/rough-sleeping/rough-sleepers-and-complex-needs/>

⁹ Welsh Conservatives (2018), *Housing a Nation* https://www.welshconservatives.com/sites/www.welshconservatives.com/files/2018-12/Housing_a_Nation.pdf

¹⁰ Plaid Cymru (2019), *Housing Supply for the Future*, https://www.partyof.wales/housing_cartrefi

¹¹ Bramley, G. (2018) *Housing supply requirements across Great Britain for low income households and homeless people*. London: National Housing Federation and Crisis, <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/housing-models-and-access/housing-supply-requirements-across-great-britain-2018/>

5. Enhanced measures to prevent homelessness from state institutions

There is still a lot of evidence that people are becoming homeless on leaving state institutions in Wales, despite the existence of agreed pathways for groups such as people leaving prison.

The Independent Monitoring Board of HMP Cardiff found the “lack of accommodation on release was a major concern within the resettlement process” and that this was both “inhumane” and a “major factor in reoffending”.¹² Welsh Government’s own evaluation of homelessness services to adults in the secure estate found variation in practice and evidence of different public services not cooperating effectively to prevent homelessness.¹³ WLGA’s analysis of the 2018 rough sleeping count mentions the need to improve provision.¹⁴

Crisis recommends Welsh Government establish a ‘duty to prevent’ all individuals at risk of homelessness to housing services and for the duty to rest with public bodies beyond housing. A ‘duty to refer’ people at risk to housing services exists in England as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which the Housing (Wales) Act inspired.¹⁵

Welsh Government should also explore the potential of using Critical Time Intervention, which is a model designed to prevent homelessness for people with mental illness, following discharge from hospitals, shelters, prisons and other institutions. The Social Care Institute for Excellence says:

“This transitional period is one in which people often have difficulty re-establishing themselves in stable housing with access to needed support. Critical Time Intervention works in two main ways: by providing emotional and practical support during the critical time of transition and by strengthening the individual’s long-term ties to services, family, and friends. Ideally, workers who have established relationships with clients during their institutional stay to deliver post-discharge assistance.”¹⁶

¹² Independent Monitoring Board (2019), Annual Report – HMP Cardiff, <https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/imb-prod-storage-1ocod6bqky0vo/uploads/2019/02/Cardiff-2017-18-pub-Feb-2019.pdf>

¹³ Madoc-Jones, I., Hughes, C., Dubberley, S., Gorden, C., Washington Dyer, K., Wilson, F., Ahmed, A., Lockwood, K., Wilding, M. (2018), Evaluation of homelessness services to adults in the secure estate. Welsh Government. <https://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2018/180627-evaluation-homelessness-services-adults-secure-estate-en.pdf>

¹⁴ WLGA (2019), Analysis of 2 week National Rough Sleeper Count Questionnaires November 2018, <https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=2182>

¹⁵ For more on the development of the duty in England see Jacob, R. (2018) Preventing homelessness: It’s everybody’s business. London: Crisis. <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/the-crisis-blog/preventing-homelessness-it-s-everybody-s-business/>

¹⁶ Social Care Institute for Excellence (2018) A rapid evidence assessment of what works in homelessness services, London: Crisis, <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/services-and-interventions/a-rapid-evidence-assessment-of-what-works-in-homelessness-services-2018/>

6. Scaling-up the Housing First approach for people with complex needs

A review for Crisis found that the evidence for Housing First is both “exceptionally strong” and “far stronger than is true of any other housing-related intervention targeting rough sleepers”.¹⁷ Housing First works for people with high and complex needs to help them access long-term, high quality support for as long as they need while living in ordinary, permanent housing. The consensus is that it works for people where no other housing approach has worked or is likely to work. Housing First is just one form of the ‘rapid rehousing’ approach, along with other measures, such as Critical Time Interventions, which are considered above.

Estimates for Crisis say that scaling up Housing First would involve placements for somewhere between 600 and 1,100 people (lower and higher estimates respectively).¹⁸ Crisis is a member of the Wales Housing First Network and has been involved in implementing the Welsh Government action plan’s measure to ensure Housing First’s principles are adhered to in the implementation of the approach. The priority for Welsh Government, local authorities, and other partners should be to scale up the approach as quickly as is practical while retaining the agreed national principles for Housing First.

To achieve this, we need to re-think commissioning practices. Housing First requires a different way of delivering services to people with complex needs who are homeless. It is effective but takes time and is a longer-term commitment that requires much more secure and long-term funding arrangements. The outcomes rely on the security of housing and a broad range of support services that are flexible and responsive to the person.

7. How Welsh Government will encourage a more humane debate on homelessness, focused on solutions and the dignity of those affected

Under the ‘support’ actions the Welsh Government plan says it would be:
*“Promoting a positive message to the public about the best way to help a rough sleeper, and raise awareness of the difference between street based activity and those who are actually homeless. (From October 2018)”*¹⁹

As our own evidence shows, this is important not just for human dignity but for the public and policymakers to understand the causes and solutions to homelessness. At the moment, the public generally does not think about homelessness in terms of broader policies and trends and thinks of homelessness as shaped by the homeless person’s circumstances, character and choices rather

¹⁷ Mackie, P., Johnsen, S., and Wood, J. (2017) Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review. Crisis: London, p.xi

¹⁸ Blood, I., Goldup, M., Peter, L. and Dulson, S. (2018) Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales. Imogen Blood & Associates. London: Crisis and Homeless Link

¹⁹ Welsh Government (2018), Rough sleeping action plan

than factors like the shortage of affordable homes or delays in receiving support.²⁰ We also know from polling evidence for Crisis that while 81% of the Welsh public was worried about homelessness and over half (57%) feel angry, upset or frustrated about homelessness across Britain.²¹

Crisis is very concerned about the state of discussion in the public domain about rough sleeping and wider homelessness. We worked late last year with Shelter Cymru to jointly publicise our concerns.²² Particularly, we are concerned that the discussion can miss the causes and solutions of homelessness; and the value and human dignity of people forced to sleep rough have not been respected, including by some people in positions of authority. There are some good examples of media coverage²³ but also some bad examples, including:

- Many references in media headlines and coverage to 'the homeless' as a type/class of person.
- Dehumanised discussion about 'homeless tents' (rather than people).
- Senior local elected politicians talking about sleeping rough as a 'lifestyle choice'²⁴ or saying individual rough sleepers are responsible for their situation by saying there is 'no need' to sleep rough.
- Campaigns, backed by local authorities, that use potentially misleading imagery and messages about individuals on the streets and aim to discourage the public from giving to or engaging with people on the streets. These include the 'diverted giving' schemes in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Neath Port Talbot.

Crisis would like to see Welsh Government challenging individuals and organisations who talk about people affected by homelessness in this way and to work with the housing and homelessness sectors, media and public on reframing the debate about ending homelessness to ensure respect for all people affected and constructive, solution-focused discussion that includes those who have experience of homelessness as key partners.

²⁰ O'Neil, M., Gerstein Pineau, M., Kendall-Taylor, N., Volmert, D., Stevens, A. (2017) Finding a Better Frame: How to Create More Effective Messages on Homelessness in the United Kingdom. FrameWorks Institute.

²¹ Crisis (2018), Over three-fifths of people across Wales feel powerless to help homeless people, new survey shows, <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/public-feels-powerless-to-help-homeless-people/>

²² Crisis and Shelter Cymru (2018), Call for councils to change their approach to begging, <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/crisis-and-shelter-cymru-call-for-councils-to-change-begging-approach/>

²³ WalesOnline (5 February 2019), The complex set of reasons why homelessness in Wales is more visible than ever, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/complex-set-reasons-homelessness-wales-15769048>

²⁴ BBC Wales News online (5 May 2018), Cardiff rough sleepers are making 'lifestyle choices', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-44012807>

Core homelessness definition

- Rough Sleeping
- Sleeping in tents, cars, public transport
- Squatting (unlicensed, insecure)
- Unsuitable non-residential accommodation e.g. 'beds in sheds'
- Hostel residents
- Users of night/winter shelters
- Domestic abuse survivor in a refuge
- Unsuitable temporary accommodation (which includes bed and breakfast accommodation, hotels etc.
- 'Sofa Surfing' – staying with others (not close family), on short term/insecure basis/wanting to move, in crowded conditions (this does not include students)

Source: Bramley, G. (2017) Homelessness projections: Core homelessness in Great Britain, London: Crisis

Number of people estimated to be sleeping rough or in cars, tents and public transport across GB and its nations, 2010-17

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% change: 2012-17	% change: 2016-17
GB	Rough Sleepers	5,100	6,150	6,200	7,250	7,250	9,150	10,250	12,300	98%	20%
	Car, tent, p t	4,850	5,850	5,900	6,900	6,950	8,850	9,950	11,950	103%	20%
England	Rough Sleepers	4,000	5,000	5,000	6,000	6,000	8,000	9,000	11,000	120%	22%
	Car, tent, p t	4,000	5,000	5,000	6,000	6,000	8,000	9,000	11,000	120%	22%
Wales	Rough Sleepers	250	250	200	250	250	300	300	350	75%	17%
	Car, tent, p t	250	200	200	200	250	250	300	300	50%	0%
Scotland	Rough Sleepers	850	900	1,000	1,000	1,000	850	950	950	-5%	0%
	Car, tent, p t	600	650	700	700	700	600	650	650	-7%	0%

Source: Bramley, G. (2017) Homelessness projections: Core homelessness in Great Britain, London: Crisis²⁵

²⁵ Plus updated figures in Crisis (2018) 'More than 24,000 people facing Christmas sleeping rough or in cars, trains, buses and tents, Crisis warns', <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/more-than-24-000-people-facing-christmas-sleeping-rough-or-in-cars-trains-buses-and-tents-crisis-warns/>