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'YOU CAN'T JUST WAVE A MAGIC WAND, CAN YOU?'

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE PRIORITY NEED SYSTEM IN WALES

FELLOWSHIP REPORT FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES RESEARCH SERVICE

DR HELEN TAYLOR
CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

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Summary

Currently in Wales, priority need is defined by a set of categories which do not include individuals who are sleeping rough. Following an increase in the visibility of rough sleeping in Wales, stakeholders have called for the inclusion of individuals who are rough sleeping as a specific category within this set of priority groups. The Welsh Government have committed to exploring potential changes to these groups to include rough sleepers by January 2020.

The aim of this research was to engage with individuals who have experience of the priority need system in Wales to discuss this proposal of including rough sleeping as a priority need category. When gathering data however, it became apparent from respondents' narratives that the most impactful element of their experience did not directly relate to the duties they could claim under legislation, but the quality of their implementation. Respondents were also keen to share ideas about improving the system, beyond a discussion of the priority need categories. There was a recognition of the complexity of addressing the issue of homelessness. Although all respondents called for changes to the system, there was a sense of pragmatism about these proposals, as one respondent asserted "you can't just wave a magic wand, can you?"

This report outlines the issues experienced by respondents and their proposals for change. The most important elements of their experience were not necessarily their legal rights, but the process of accessing help and the quality of the support offered following their homelessness assessment. The report will conclude by discussing how these recommendations relate to the broader literature on rough sleeping and homelessness, as well as the Homeless Action Group's first report. It is hoped that these recommendations from individuals with lived experience will feed into political decision-making on the future structure and implementation of homelessness legislation.

Contents

1. Introduction and key recommendations

Homelessness, and rough sleeping in particular, has increased in visibility over the past nine years both in terms of the number of individuals who are sleeping rough and political recognition of the issue. Between 2010 and 2018 there was an increase in rough sleeping of 169% in England (NAO 2018) with statistics showing individuals sleeping rough in areas not usually associated with the issue. Trends in rising numbers of individuals sleeping rough are also seen in Wales, captured through both Welsh Government and third sector organisations' figures.

In Wales, the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* introduced a new prevention duty extending the rights that individuals have to access help with homelessness or threatened homelessness. Research has shown that this legislation has had a variety of positive outcomes (Fitzpatrick et al. 2017), including a more person-centred approach leading to a more inclusive statutory response to homelessness. Despite this, there was an increase of between 16% and 30% in rough sleeping between 2015 and 2017 (Fitzpatrick et al. 2017).

The Welsh Government has responded to this by publishing the two-year Rough Sleeping Action Plan in February 2018, to supplement the Ten-Year Homelessness Plan 2009-2019. The Plan included a range of commitments including to conduct research looking into the causes of the recent rise in rough sleeping, as well as reviewing processes used to collect data on rough sleeping. A further commitment in the Action Plan was to consider the use of secondary legislation to amend priority need categories used to include rough sleepers. If individuals fit into these categories they are regarded as 'priority' and this impacts on their statutory duty to support.

This report will outline the findings of research into lived experiences of the priority need system in Wales. Drawing on primary data (see Annex 1 for methodology) collected through 8 interviews, and a workshop, across Wales, it will outline a series of recommendations on how to improve the priority need system in Wales from those who have experienced it. This is a timely piece of research due to the proximity of the end of the Welsh Government's Rough Sleeping Action Plan. It is hoped that the findings from this will add to the body of evidence from individuals who have experienced homelessness and will contribute to decision-making about the future of the statutory homelessness system in Wales.

It is important to note that the research was designed to take a retrospective look at individuals' experience of the priority need system and ask for their views about the potential of extending priority need to include rough sleepers. As the research was undertaken it became clear that individuals had lots of both broad and specific recommendations about how the system could be

improved. The report will outline the issues experienced by individuals and their recommendations for improvement.

These recommendations are:

1) A more person-centred approach;

2) Increased flexibility in the system;

3) Staff with lived experience;

4) Establishing a Homelessness Services Regulator

5) Investment in substance misuse services;

6) Better quality temporary accommodation;

7) Investment in day services; and

8) Better links between education and homelessness.

These recommendations are outlined in three main themes; legislation, implementation, and interaction with other services. In section 7, these recommendations will be discussed in the context of broader literature on homelessness and rough sleeping. Section 8 will outline the recommendations from the Homeless Action Group report and how these relate to the recommendations from this research.

2. Discussions of priority need in Wales

Homelessness, and rough sleeping in particular, are currently key political priorities for both the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government. This is demonstrated by the series of inquiries, pieces of research, and policy developments in these areas (outlined below). Included in these are discussions around the future of the priority need system.

i) The Welsh Government's Rough Sleeping Action Plan was published in February 2018 and provides a two-year action plan for the Welsh Government to address the issue of rough sleeping. In discussing priority need, the plan outlines that the Welsh Government will consider the case to amend secondary legislation to modify priority need categories, to potentially include rough sleepers. A decision is due to be made on this by January 2020.

ii) The Equality, Local Government, and Communities Committee's report *Life on the streets: preventing and tackling rough sleeping in Wales* was published in April 2018. A number of

the Committee's recommendations related to the use of priority need testing. Follow up work on this topic took place in Autumn 2019.

iii) The Welsh Government commissioned a piece of research evaluating the implementation of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act, which was published in July 2018. The University of Salford collected data from national stakeholders, local authorities and service users across Wales and outlined a series of recommendations around priority need.

iv) The Equality, Communities, and Local Government Committee held a follow up session with the Minister for Housing and Local Government (Julie James AM) on the Rough Sleeping Action Plan in March 2019. During this session, the Minister noted that an independent assessment of the use of priority need has been commissioned and will report by April 2020.

v) The Minister for Housing and Local Government (Julie James AM) announced the creation of a Homelessness Action Group on 28th June 2019. Chaired by Jon Sparkes from Crisis, the group includes representatives from the third sector, local government, housing associations, and academia. The group has been tasked with providing independent policy solutions needed to address a series of questions relating to tackling homelessness. The group will work on addressing these issues until March 2020, with a focus on listening to experts with experience of the homelessness system.

There are therefore a series of key potential decision-making points around homelessness and the use of priority need testing over the next 6 months:

October 2019	January 2020	February 2020	March 2020	2020
Equality, Local Government, and Communities Committee follow up work into rough sleeping completed.	Decision to be made on action point from Welsh Government Rough Sleeping Action Plan on expanding priority need categories	End of Welsh Government Rough Sleeping Action Plan	Conclusion of the work of the Homelessness Action Group	Publication of the Welsh Government's independent review into priority need

3. Findings: Legislation

As noted, the research was designed specifically to ask people about their experiences of homelessness and their views on the extension of priority need to rough sleepers. Two points became clear through the interviews. First, that the problems experienced by individuals with the homelessness system were not necessarily linked to rough sleeping not being a priority need category. Many respondents were likely to be in one of the existing priority need categories, but implementation of the existing legislative requirements relating to priority need was inconsistent. Second, respondents had very clear suggestions about how the system could be improved and were keen to share these ideas.

Other elements of the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014*, aside from priority need, were highlighted as problematic during the interviews. There were no specific questions about these, but individuals highlighted these elements as contributing to their negative experience of the legislation.

3.1 Issue: Intentionality

A number of respondents highlighted the intentionality test as being more problematic than the priority need test. One respondent highlighted the difficulty in evidencing whether individuals had made themselves intentionally homeless, particularly where this had occurred as a result of relationship breakdown. This was supported by comments from another respondent who also raised concerns about the definition of intentionality. They outlined the situation where individuals who have accommodation tied to their employment can be deemed to be intentionally homeless if they lose that job. It was suggested that in some parts of the country with lots of resorts and hotels, contracts will be ended deliberately so that staff have to leave at the end of a season.

Intentionality was also linked to discussions about individuals receiving an inappropriate offer of support when found to be in priority need. (see section 6.1.) Respondents noted that if this inappropriate offer was rejected by the individual, then the local authority could class them as being intentionally homeless.

3.2 Issue: Priority need and single men

The one specific issue highlighted with the priority need test as currently constructed was the lack of support for single men. A respondent had experienced relationship breakdown and noted that men often left the family home if this occurred. This was linked to previous comments about intentionality, and the respondent felt that it was unfair that single men in this situation did not receive support if this was classed as intentional homelessness.

3.3 Issue: Prevention duty

Although welcoming a focus on prevention, respondents criticised the way the prevention duty comes to an end, with some feeling that there was "door-slamming" after the 56 days. They highlighted the negative impact of the end of this support on their mental health, and that it had caused a breakdown in trust between the individual and local authority staff. One individual stated that their bed and breakfast accommodation was removed at the end of the 56 days and they felt that the local authority was saying "that's your 56 days, thank you very much". Another respondent stated that there was a lack of understanding among individuals presenting as homeless about what happened during and after those 56 days. They said that they felt a negative sense of anticipation about the forthcoming end of the duty during those weeks which impacted on their mental health.

3.4 Proposal: Extension of priority need to individuals sleeping rough

When asked specifically about the proposed extension of priority need to those rough sleeping, individuals raised a number of concerns.

a) Street-based lifestyle

A number of respondents, although welcoming a more inclusive approach to priority need, stated that just making someone a priority would not address the issues that they were experiencing. One stated "this won't solve the problem. It won't solve the problems by giving them somewhere to live, by giving them help, they have to want to do it. You have to give them that chance, at the moment there's no chance there". Respondents said that some individuals either enjoyed or did not see an adequate alternative to a street-based lifestyle, and that changing legislation alone would not address this. Broader discussions highlighted the relationship between homelessness legislation and the provision of other services, such as substance misuse services – this is outlined in section 6.

b) Length of rough sleeping

Other respondents raised concerns about how to define whether someone was a 'rough sleeper' and whether this might lead to unintended consequences or individuals 'taking advantage of the system'. Although supportive of the potential inclusion of this new category, there were concerns from some respondents that individuals would sleep rough (when they were not already sleeping rough) to access support quicker. Respondents also noted that individuals should be sleeping rough for a certain amount of time before being identified as a 'rough sleeper' – one stated "they should have priority if they're sleeping rough more than 4 or 5 weeks on the streets".

Regarding unintended consequences, one respondent stated:

"I do think it should happen but I do think that people would take advantage of that. I think people will go and sleep on the streets just to get housed quicker than someone who is in a hostel. If someone said to me 'you can be here for a month but if you're an actual rough sleeper for two weeks you're a priority I know which one I would pick'...I think it comes down to not only are you a rough sleeper but how long have you been rough sleeping".

Another also highlighted that individuals might worsen their situation to receive support and said "people would go and do it [rough sleeping] because you do get desperate and to be honest I think I'd do it as well". Respondents were keen to emphasise that there should be ways to stop individuals 'taking advantage of the system' if this was introduced and that careful thought must be given to how the 'rough sleeping' priority group was defined.

4. Findings: Principles

A number of principles emerged from the workshop and interviews about how the priority need system should function. There were no specific questions on this, but the following two issues were consistently raised by respondents.

4.1 Equality

Respondents were keen to assert that every individual deserved at least one, or multiple, chances for help. One stated "they all deserve one chance don't they? I believe that individuals deserve chance after chance". A second asserted "nobody should be different, there shouldn't be one rule for one and not another". Even if respondents thought that individuals might take advantage of it, they still emphasised that all individuals deserve help. Although there were no specific questions about this issue, this was a clear theme throughout the interviews.

4.2 Prioritisation

Despite this emphasis on equality, there was also a pragmatic approach to priority need testing with respondents arguing that there must be some sort of assessment of priority. One argued that there should "definitely" be a priority measurement whilst another stated that "there's got to be some sort of means test". Respondents noted that identifying how to measure this was problematic, and very hard to judge but "if homelessness is a priority in itself, there there's got to be priority for homelessness at the top level".

5. Findings: Implementation of the legislation

Respondents highlighted a number of issues about how the legislation was implemented, in terms of both staff interaction, the administration of the system, and their understanding of the system.

5.1 Issue: Staff interaction

Respondents highlighted their interactions with frontline staff, with some feeling that these were negative. One outlined that there had been "condescending" exchanges, and that there should be more compassion shown by frontline staff. Communication between those presenting as homeless and local authority staff was criticised, particularly when the staff member was seen to be "box ticking" and "reading out by rote what they have to do". Respondents called for more training for staff, to ensure that those presenting as homeless felt better supported by their interactions with staff, as "if you get the wrong person helping you it's awful".

5.2 Issue: Understanding the system

Difficulty in understanding the system, and the process they had to follow, was highlighted by respondents. They asserted that discovering who did or did not fall into priority need categories was confusing and led to friction between individuals. One respondent noted that "most information [was] very hard to understand" which made the system confusing.

5.3 Issue: Inflexibility in system

Respondents criticised the lack of flexibility in the administration of the system. Some highlighted that ongoing mental health conditions or substance misuse problems meant that they were unable to attend appointments, and that these appointments were the focus of the ongoing engagement between themselves and the local authority. They stated that it was not always easy to keep track of time when experiencing homelessness, as a result, attending appointments that were made for some time in the future was problematic. They also highlighted the issue of needing to have access to an address to receive letters or to store the necessary documentation for their application.

5.4 Issue: Mental health

Linked to this point about inflexibility, respondents questioned the focus on proving their 'priority' status, particularly if they had mental health problems. One individual stated that many people do not want to discuss their mental health conditions with local authority officers, but if this is not discussed they are not classed as being a priority. Respondents raised concerns that individuals

might let mental health conditions deteriorate before discussing these with the local authority stating "they drive you to be priority and make you go off the rails before giving you help".

One respondent stated that the priority need assessments should not be completed by the local authority but by services that work more closely with individuals experiencing homelessness. They stated that the practitioners in these services have a better understanding of people's needs (such as mental health), and therefore whether or not they should be classed as a priority.

5.5 Issue: Lack of control

The key element to all of these issues around implementation is that the respondents felt a lack of control over their own circumstances. Individuals felt as if the "system was against them" and emphasised that "a few bad experiences will make you feel that". They did not understand the system; the way it was administered was seen as a barrier (through the use of appointments); and not all interactions with staff were positive or helpful.

5.6 Recommendation: A more person-centred approach

Respondents emphasised the need for a further emphasis on a person-centred approach within the housing and homelessness system, which they felt was currently lacking. They said that this would enable individuals to be treated equally, but also recognise individuals' different needs. They called for the system to be designed to fit the individual, rather than the individual having to fit into the system – which they currently felt was the case. Respondents stated that the system should "forget the why" of why people need help and focus on delivering the most appropriate support for that individual. They called for staff to take the time to "find out who the person is you're working with" and to "think outside the box" to tackle the "individual situation".

5.7 Recommendation: Flexibility in the system

Related to this point about a person-centred approach, a number of respondents called for more choice and flexibility in how they receive support. Drawing on comments about inappropriate temporary accommodation, they said that there should be more flexibility in the offer that is made. One stated that "every individual needs to be looked at separately" and "everyone's different" so there should be a personalised system which is more tailored to people's needs. They stated that it should not be the case that local authorities say "this is what's going to happen" but rather that they ask "how do you feel about what would address your problem?" and "letting them have a bit of input into it".

Linked to this point about flexibility was the suggestion of different packages of support for individuals who were experiencing homelessness. The respondent suggested that individuals' different routes into homelessness often meant that people needed different levels of support in exiting homelessness, and there should not be a 'one size fits all' provision. The package that individuals received would therefore depend on their needs so that appropriate housing and support would be provided. This would enable individuals with high support needs to get adequate support as well as avoid a waste of resources providing support for individuals with less support needs.

Highlighting the difference between an individual who is homeless as a result of losing their house and job and one whose homelessness is a result of severe trauma, a respondent stated that these individuals would require different levels of support, as well as being able to cope with different levels of engagement with support. For the first individual, support which places an emphasis on the individual looking for accommodation or employment might be acceptable. For the second individual, this might be entirely inappropriate as they are "slowly working out of [trauma] just to get to the point of looking for work".

5.8 Recommendation: Staff with lived experience

Participants in the workshop called for more individuals with lived experience to be employed within local authority housing departments. They highlighted the focus on this within the Wallich and stated that this was a good way of delivering a person-centred approach. Participants explained that individuals who had experienced the system would focus more on individuals' needs and the most appropriate help, rather than just administering the system. They said that this could be encouraged through a Welsh Government policy emphasising lived experience in recruitment and a training programme to support these staff.

5.9 Recommendation: Homelessness Services Regulator

Addressing issues of staff culture and staff engagement, one respondent called for a Regulator to be established with oversight of the implementation and delivery of the legislation. They highlighted negative experiences of engaging with staff and said that "there needs to be a lot more focus on ensuring that there isn't that sort of thing going on". They stated that it should not be the case that the support individuals receive is dependent on who they meet when they approach the local authority for help.

6. Findings: Interaction with other services

6.1 Issue: The 'offer'

All respondents highlighted the issue of a lack of an appropriate offer of help from the local authority if they were able to access support. Responses largely focussed on the unsuitability of temporary accommodation, particularly for those who had experienced substance misuse issues. One respondent was released from prison for alcohol-related offences and placed in accommodation above a pub as his temporary accommodation. He stated "now if you're an alcoholic, it's a bad place to put you in" and described that "the guy didn't mind me having a drink even though he obviously knew I'd come from jail, he must have been told that my problem was alcohol, he was letting me into a lock-in". He noted that this prevented him from addressing his addiction, as it was too easy to access alcohol.

Another respondent outlined that she was given accommodation in floorspace and was a single female amongst 30 men using the same area. She described that "there was a lot of drugtaking…I wasn't necessarily using the toilets or anything in there because there was needles on the floor, blood up the walls…I wouldn't use the toilet or shower or nothing". Linking this to the potential for being classed as intentionally homeless, she stated that "you've got to suck it up for a couple of weeks" to stay in the system. She also noted that for those "people who are just out of jail and have done a stretch and have come off all the drugs…[to go to a hostel] it's so hard. They surround you, the drinking, and if you want to change your life you're just chucked back 5 steps back. It's like in your head you're trying to better yourself, and you're being chucked 5 steps back".

Another individual discussed the experience of his friend who was sleeping rough in a seaside town. He stated that his friend had been offered accommodation but turned it down as it was shared with more than two other people. The friend chose to sleep rough rather than take up this offer as he does not like "going to a place with more than two people".

A fourth respondent asserted that in the past they "would not accept a night in a hostel. I felt too fragile to be around that amount of people and not have control of my environment. At least when I was outside I was in control of my environment". Others outlined that they were trying to change their lives but were put in "similar situations" to ones that they were trying to escape and that the "hostel were full of people I'm trying to stay away from".

6.2 Issue: Lack of day services

Coupled with this issue of unsuitable accommodation was the availability of suitable day services, and how this is linked to individuals addressing substance misuse or mental health issues. Respondents outlined that often they had to leave their temporary accommodation in the morning and struggled to occupy their time during the day. One outlined that they were "just going [to the] swimming [pool] to go to the toilet. For the sake of a couple of quid I'd have somewhere to go all day and have a shower and that".

Another noted that individuals had to leave their temporary accommodation at 8am each morning and the local day centre had recently closed. They said "because you get kicked out at 8 o'clock in the morning, you're out on the streets all day, you know, I ended up bumping into people I didn't want to be bumping into". After the closure of the day centre they said that there was nothing to do, and that the centre had been a "godsend". This was echoed by another respondent in the same town. They stated "a few years ago, I would have really missed this place. You pay a pound and you'd come in here and have a cup of tea and something to eat, and there was a shower…it would have really hurt me to take away somewhere to get clean and have a wash". As well as the hygiene element of this service, they also noted that it provided somewhere for individuals to go so that they did not drink on the streets. They said "a lot of them would have a bit of a snooze for a couple of hours, they were out of the way, they weren't drinking whilst they were here, they'd have something to eat and would be out of the way for a few hours. Where are they now? They're going to be drinking more, they're [going] to be stuck on the streets".

6.3 Issue: Role of education

Although there was not a question relating to this, a number of respondents traced their experiences of homelessness and related issues back to their experience of the education system. One stated that their mental health issues began when they were at school but that the education system was not set up to understand these. They said that they were "constantly told you're no good, you're stupid" and this "takes a pounding on your brain". Others highlighted that they were dyslexic, but this had not been recognised at school, leading to poor performance. They highlighted the importance of education in developing social skills as children and the link between this and positive relationships as adults. They stated that the education system "does not look outside the box" and emphasised the importance of education in preventing homelessness.

6.4 Recommendation: Investment in substance misuse services

Respondents in the workshop called for more investment into substance misuse services such as Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service (GDAS). They highlighted issues with accessing support within an appropriate timeframe which can affect an individual's ability and motivation to sustain engagement. They said that immediate help should be available, rather than individuals being placed on waiting lists. Linked to previous comments about appointments, they noted how difficult it was for individuals to be able to attend appointments or receive paperwork for appointments that are happening in a number of months' time. The respondents also stated that controlled environments such as places where individuals can safely use illicit substances should be made available as part of a harm reduction approach.

6.5 Recommendation: Better quality temporary accommodation

The respondents who had been critical of the accommodation 'offer' following their classification as being in priority need were largely referring to large-scale hostels or shelters as a form of temporary accommodation. Respondents outlined a number of ways in which this 'offer' could be improved:

- Units of temporary accommodation that provide housing for a smaller number of people;

- Offers of both abstinent and non-abstinent accommodation rather than mixed provision;

- Investment in staff in temporary accommodation so there are more staff and they are better trained;

- Emphasis on peer staff – individuals who have had experience of homelessness; and

- Stricter rules around acceptable behaviour in hostels to reduce issues of violence and substance misuse.

6.6 Recommendation: Investment in day services

Individuals also called for more investment in day services. This was linked to individuals' ability to tackle issues such as substance misuse, as well as being able to meet basic needs such as washing and socialising. The closure of a day centre in one location was keenly felt, and individuals were concerned about the negative impact that this would have on individuals who were homeless in that area.

6.7 Recommendation: Better links between education and homelessness

Following on from discussions on the link between education and homelessness, respondents highlighted a number of ways that this could be addressed. They called for:

a) A better understanding of issues related to homelessness at school such as social and financial exclusion, as well as schools being better at spotting early signs of any issues;

b) Greater inclusion of homelessness on the curriculum so that children understand what it is and how people are impacted by it as well as how to appropriately engage with individuals experiencing homelessness.

The respondents noted that this would both help children who are at risk of homelessness now or in the future, but also educate children to prevent them from being aggressive towards individuals who are rough sleeping (which they had experienced).

7. Recommendations and the broader literature

In this next section, the recommendations from this research will be discussed in relation to broader policy literature on homelessness. The literature includes both research focussed on evidence-based practice and policy evaluation, as well as research which outlines the narratives from individuals who have been service users. In this way, the recommendations from the respondents to this research can be situated within broader research on policy recommendations from both academic and service user perspectives.

7.1 A more person-centred approach

Crisis (Fitzpatrick et al. 2017) have shown that the introduction of the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* has led to a more inclusive statutory system, and the "re-orientating the culture of local authorities towards a more preventative, person-centred and outcome-focussed approach". Taking a person-centred approach is a core element of the legislation with the guidance introducing Personal Housing Plans for all individuals classified as homeless. However, the evaluation of the Act by the University of Salford outlines that although these Plans are seen as useful for staff members and a tool in changing the culture of Housing Solutions Teams, they are not considered as useful by service users (Ahmed et al. 2018, p. 214). The evaluation recommends that there needs to be more collaboration between staff and service users to ensure that the Plan is tailored to individual needs. This recommendation, alongside their first recommendation that "local authorities should conduct

holistic assessments, which go beyond housing need to uncover any additional unmet needs", have the highest priority within the evaluation's recommendations (2018, p. 214).

The recommendation on more personalised support is echoed in the *Hard Edges Scotland 2019* report. This research engaged with individuals experiencing severe multiple deprivation in Scotland who use a number of different services. Across all respondents, good service was characterised by the provision of emotional as well as practical support and "'personalised' support tailored to the specific individual" (Bramley et al. 2019, p. 180). Respondents to the Hard Edges research stated (p. 181):

> "There's no point just going through the same plan as everybody goes through, know what I mean?" (Male, 35-39, semi-rural)

> "I think it's recognising where you are. …. It's not just their plan for you; you're putting a bit of your work plan into action as well. So you're both working on it: you and whoever the organisation you're working with." (Female, 30-34, semi-rural)

This is further supported by Crisis' *Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review* (Mackie et al. 2017) which looked at a variety of different interventions used internationally to tackle the issue of rough sleeping. Part of their conclusion was that across several interventions "person-centred support including choice for the individual, has proven to be particularly effective in supporting entrenched rough sleepers into accommodation" (p. 107). They particularly highlighted the use of Personalised Budgets as an effective form of person-centred intervention to tackle rough sleeping.

7.2 Increased flexibility in the system

Within this call for a more person-centred approach to support, there is also a recommendation for more flexibility within the system. Again, this is a recommendation in the University of Salford evaluation of the legislation, stating that there needs to be more flexibility in interpreting the meaning of 'reasonable steps' within the legislation. The recommendation from the Salford research highlights that individuals have different levels of capacity for engagement with services, and that this should be recognised within tailored 'reasonable steps'.

This is supported by the Crisis (Mackie at al. 2017) evidence review which calls for the recognition of heterogeneity amongst service users as the first principle to underpin any approach to tackling rough sleeping. The review states (p. 110):

Rough sleepers are a heterogenous group, with varying housing and support needs and different entitlements to access publicly funded support. Moreover, across the UK there is variation in both the profile of rough sleepers and the profile of local housing markets. An improved approach must take account of this heterogeneity.

This focus on heterogeneity would enable a person-centred approach to be further developed. It would therefore assist in addressing issues that the respondents to this research highlighted around temporary accommodation and their ability to engage with the process such as attending appointments.

7.3 Staff with lived experience

Although employing staff with lived experience is not a direct recommendation in the Salford research, the evaluation highlights the importance of training in improving the implementation of the legislation. Recommendation 12.14 calls for further training for Housing Solutions and non-statutory staff on the "ethos and impacts of practice" (p. 216) as well as the technicalities of implementing the legislation. They state that the basis of the training should be the broad skill-set required to implement the ethos of the Act including "motivational interviewing; customer service; empathy; mediation; problem solving; liaison; person-centred practice; counselling; mental health awareness" (p. 216).

This is supported by the Wales Audit Office (2018) report into how local government manages homelessness demand. They recommend that local authorities "ensure that their staff are sufficiently skilled to deal with the new demands of mediating, problem solving, negotiating and influencing with homeless people" (p. 13) which the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* has introduced. As part of this research, a checklist was developed for local authorities to undertake a self-assessment on the services they provide. Part of this relates to the quality of information available including testing that service users understand this, particularly when they are "anxious or uncertain about their future" (p. 96). This could be used to address the issues that the respondents to this research highlighted around not understanding the process and feeling like they have a lack of control over the processes they were involved in.

7.4 Homelessness Services Regulator

The establishment of a regulator for homelessness services is also found in the Salford evaluation. This recommends that "the Welsh Government should establish a regulatory body to monitor performance and partnership working across sectors and authorities" (p. 221). Both this report and a

series of recommendations form the Salford research relate to individuals experiencing a lack of consistency in the quality of help and engagement they receive. Recommendation 12.37 from the Salford research calls for the development of service standards that are co-produced with service users to ensure consistency across Housing Solutions teams. These should be monitored by local authorities and audited by the Homelessness Network (p. 220). Recommendation 12.40 asserts that the Homelessness Network could also audit 'first point of contact' experiences by undertaking mystery shopping activities which could be used to create measures to support frontline staff (p. 220).

7.5 Investment in substance misuse services

The relationship between homelessness and substance misuse is complex (Pleace 2008). Substance misuse can be understood as both a contributing factor to homelessness or a response to coping with the experience of homelessness. Furthermore, individuals who are involved in substance misuse are also likely to share a range of other characteristics such as "experiencing family disruption in childhood; physical or sexual abuse in childhood; poor exam marks, truancy and school exclusion; childhood conduct disorder; health problems; and contacts with the criminal justice system" (2008, p. 14). Respondents in this report discussed substance misuse as something that contributed to their homelessness, and often prevented them from being able to fully engage in the process of addressing their housing situation. They called for more investment in these services, so that individuals can tackle their substance misuse issues alongside working with frontline officers to find a home.

This parallel engagement with other services relates to recommendation 12.39 from the University of Salford evaluation which states (p. 220):

> Local authorities should embed other services in Housing Solutions teams. For example, specialist mental health, debt advice and drug and alcohol co-ordinators should be included in Housing Solutions Teams/across authorities.

Respondents in this report called for better access to substance misuse services including co-location of services and the immediate availability of appointments.

7.6 Better quality temporary accommodation

Crisis' evidence review (Mackie et al. 2017) outlines that there are numerous pieces of research which outline individuals' experiences of hostels, but a "dearth" (p. xi) of evidence on the efficacy of these as an intervention to tackle rough sleeping. The review outlines evidence which shows that

hostels protect individuals from the dangers of sleeping on the streets but they also present their own hazards. The review notes "the onset and/or escalation of drug misuse amongst residents is widely reported, the risk of communicable disease transmission high, and deterioration in mental health common. The management of antisocial behaviour is an ongoing challenge for staff" (p. xi). All of these issues were highlighted by the respondents in this report.

The review concludes that the evidence shows that many people who have used large scale hostels find these services to be "intimidating or unpleasant environments and this is particularly true for young people, transgender people, and women" (p. 109). It highlights the relationship between large-scale hostels being an inappropriate type of accommodation and the lack of adequate move-on processes, mean that individuals are using hostels for much longer than the short-term use for which they were intended. The review outlines the evidence base for Housing First as an effective intervention to tackle rough sleeping, and asserts that interventions should be housing-led (meaning quick access to settled accommodation) with a shift away from the 'staircase model' of support which often begins with a period of time in a hostel before individuals can access longer-term accommodation.

7.7 Investment in day services

In discussing the relationship between hostel use and substance misuse, the Crisis evidence review highlights the role that boredom can play in preventing individuals from tackling their drug and alcohol use (p. 22). This links with the experiences of respondents in this report who raised concerns that a lack of places to go, or activities to engage in, during the day undermined their ability to address their substance misuse issues.

Bristol City Council has recently opened a 24-hour hostel with 30 beds providing services over the winter months. It is run by the charity St Mungo's alongside other partners. The aim is for this service to be a hub for partner agencies to bring their services to the people who are living there, with a variety of different support services, learning opportunities, and activities made available for residents. The shelter opened for its first six months between 1st October 2018 and 31st March 2019 and will reopen in October 2019 (St. Mungo's 2018). This type of provision addresses a number of the issues highlighted by the respondents to this research in terms of being able to access services flexibly and having activities to become involved in as a means of tackling substance misuse issues and social isolation.

7.8 Better links between education and homelessness

As outlined previously in this report, the link between education and homelessness was raised unprompted by respondents. Within the *Hard Edges Scotland 2019* report, respondents were asked about missed opportunities to address their experiences of severe multiple deprivation: many highlighted education and schooling. Similar to the respondents to this research, some stated that the lack of access to counselling and mental health support at school had contributed to their experience of deprivation and exclusion. Others highlighted the missed opportunity for a diagnosis of a behavioural or learning difficulty within their time in education.

8. Links with recommendations from the Homelessness Action Group

The first report from the Homelessness Action Group (HAG), established by Welsh Government in June 2019, was published in October 2019. This referred to the second question put to the group:

> What immediate actions can we take to reduce rough sleeping between now and the winter of 2019/20, and to end rough sleeping altogether?

The report outlines a series of recommendations for the Welsh Government to implement in the short term in order to both make an immediate difference to individuals sleeping on the streets in Wales and prevent rough sleeping. A number of these recommendations mirror those from this report's respondents – these are outlined below.

8.1 Implementation: A more person-centred and flexible approach

Elements of most of the HAG recommendations reflect the recommendations from this report regarding a more person-centred and flexible approach to accessing support for homelessness. Respondents to this report emphasised the importance of service providers being able to find tailored solutions for individuals, rather than individuals having to fit into a structured system that does not meet their needs. The core recommendation that reflects this in the HAG work is outlined below, but it is important to note that cumulatively all the recommendations would lead to a more flexible, person-centred, approach.

8.1.1 Recommendation 1 from the HAG report calls for the implementation of Assertive Outreach Services to enable individuals "to move away from rough sleeping and into good quality and appropriate emergency, temporary or permanent accommodation and housing at the earliest opportunity".

Within the development of these services, Outreach Workers will be empowered to provide the best solution for the individual in front of them. Outreach Workers will be able to access a small budget for each individual and use their professional discretion to enable individuals to receive the appropriate support for their situation.

This addresses a number of issues raised by the respondents to this priority need report about the lack of flexibility in the system and personalised support. It also reflects the call for participants for there to be better relationships between those presenting as homeless and those providing the support. On the proposed Assertive Outreach model a psychologically-informed approach would be taken with an emphasis on Worker and individual working together to access appropriate support.

8.2 Interaction with other services: Investment in substance misuse services

A multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approach is key to the recommendations make in the HAG report. This was also raised by respondents to this priority need research around being able to access timely and appropriate support for other issues such as mental health and substance misuse. It also reflects the recommendation from respondents for more investment in substance misuse services.

8.2.1 Recommendation 1 from the HAG report includes a multi-agency approach, which addresses the recommendation from the respondents to this research around an investment in substance misuse services. On the proposed model a multi-disciplinary approach will be taken to support, with daily case conferences between different teams about individuals who are rough sleeping and the best way to support them using a multi-agency approach.

8.2.2 Recommendation 10 calls for a removal of "the barriers and address misunderstandings that stop people at risk of homelessness or who are rough sleeping from accessing the basic human need for adequate housing and support". This involves the consideration of the development of Enhanced Harm Reduction Services as well as a 'duty to cooperate' being placed on other public bodies to enable better prevention and support for those who are homeless.

8.2.3 Recommendation 11 requires the "commissioning of outreach services and other services for people who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping to promote sustained solutions that support people out of rough sleeping and homelessness for good". Here the focus is on the ability of services to provide appropriate, sustainable, solutions rather than focussing on short-term bidding and short-term outcomes. Again, this recommendation calls for services to be focussed on delivering

psychologically-informed support that will enable individuals to easily access appropriate multi-agency support.

8.3 Interaction with other services: Better quality temporary accommodation

The issue of poor-quality emergency and temporary accommodation was highlighted by interviewees for the HAG report who had experienced or worked in homelessness. This echoes experiences from the respondents to this priority need report who discussed their negative experiences of large-scale or inappropriate temporary accommodation. Evidence of individuals choosing to sleep rough rather than access emergency accommodation because of the poor standards and dangerous conditions emerged through the consultations for the HAG research, which reflected similar experience to respondents to this report.

8.3.3 Recommendation 3 from the HAG report calls on the Welsh Government to "ensure that emergency and temporary alternatives to rough sleeping are available with the capacity needed, and the diversity of provision, to maximise impact and dignity". The report outlines that emergency accommodation during winter should be short term, and not be of poor quality and that this type of accommodation should not include "tents, pods or temporary structures, floor space or 'sitting up' facilities".

The report outlines the emergency accommodation standards that are being developed by End Rough Sleeping Cymru network and states that these should be used as a national benchmark for emergency accommodation when completed.

9. Conclusion – key points

This report outlines a number of recommendations from respondents about their experience of the housing and homelessness system. Although these come from a small sample of individuals, it is important to acknowledge the narratives of those who have experienced the system and their recommendations for how it could be changed.

The sample also covers a range of different areas in Wales, providing a picture of rough sleeping and homelessness from more rural and more urban areas in the north, south, and west. Moreover, the recommendations outlined in the report are supported by broader literature on both the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* specifically and wider research into tackling rough sleeping and multiple deprivation on an international and UK level. A number of the recommendations that are outlined in this report are also echoed by the recommendations from the Homeless Action Group report,

particularly around a more person-centred approach to support and an improvement of standards for emergency accommodation.

It is hoped that this report feeds into decision-making processes into the approach to homelessness in Wales and provides another means by which the voices of individuals with lived experience can be heard.

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Annexe 1 – Methodological approach

Area	Method	Sample
Town south	Semi-structured interview	3
Town west	Semi-structured interview	3
City north	Semi-structured interview	2
City south	Facilitated workshop	2

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were used in three out of four locations to gather data. Questions were designed to gather data on individuals' experiences of priority need, and their views on a specific legislative change to this, but also to leave space for individuals to talk about broader issues that they felt had impacted on their experience of the homelessness system. The solutions-focussed nature of the data from the first three sets of interviews led to the design of a workshop which was more interactive and creative, and specifically focussed on creating recommendations for change.

Recruitment

Third sector homelessness organisations in the different areas across Wales were contacted regarding undertaking interviews with some of their service users. These took place in a variety of settings including a day centre, temporary accommodation provision, and a harm reduction-focussed temporary accommodation project. In some settings, arrangements were made to interview service users prior to the researcher visiting the project. In others, the researcher visited the project and invited individuals to speak with them whilst they were there. Ethical approval was granted from Cardiff Metropolitan University and the research was carried out according to these standards.