

Ymgynghoriad ar flaenoriaethau'r Pwyllgor Llywodraeth Leol a Thai ar gyfer y  
Chweched Senedd

Consultation on the Local Government and Housing Committee's priorities  
for the Sixth Senedd

Ymateb gan: Crisis

Response from: Crisis

**Consultation response: priorities for the Local Government and Housing Committee**

**About Crisis**

We are the national charity for people experiencing homelessness. Working across Wales, England and Scotland we help people directly out of homelessness and campaign for the changes needed to solve it altogether.

**Summary**

Crisis welcomes the opportunity to suggest priorities to the committee on ending homelessness. We recommend the committee takes an interest in:

- Ensuring that fundamental reform of homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing in the Welsh programme for government works with the commitment to deliver 20,000 new social homes across Wales, and that people on low incomes and experiencing homelessness can access the support to have a social tenancy (*pages 1-3 in this paper*).
- As Covid-19 cases increase across many parts of Wales in September 2021 Crisis recommends the committee continues to look at the Covid-19 'exit strategy' for homelessness in Wales with the need to balance immediate action to keep people safe with the longer-term actions that will help end homelessness (*pages 3-5 in this paper*).

**1) Access to housing for people on low incomes and those leaving homelessness**

Crisis welcomes the pledges in the Welsh Government's 2021-26 programme to build 20,000 new low carbon social homes for rent; and to fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government (2021) *Programme for Government*

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-06/programme-for-government-2021-to-2026.pdf>

The Welsh Government commitment matches Crisis' previous estimates of the scale of housing need for people on low incomes and those experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup> During the Senedd elections we were also pleased to see cross-party consensus about the need for more social homes across Wales.<sup>3</sup>

The two main homelessness-related pledges in the programme for government can help ensure Wales ends homelessness by maximising prevention, and ensuring everyone has rapid access to support to have a home to rent. They also ensure an increase in potential housing supply that people on low incomes or those facing homelessness will have a chance to rent.

**Crisis strongly agrees with the Homelessness Action Group, which highlighted not just the importance of increasing housing supply across different tenures (including social and private rented) but also that multi-agency support is crucial to ending homelessness.<sup>4</sup> This support is vital to both preventing homelessness and to rapid rehousing.**

We support the Homelessness Action Group's framework of prevention that aims to make homelessness rarer through different levels of support:<sup>5</sup>

- Universal prevention: measures taken across society in general to reduce the risk of homelessness, e.g. investment in social housing, and ensuring there are local private rented sector access schemes in place.
- Targeted prevention: measures taken to help people more at-risk of homelessness compared with the wider population, e.g. multi-agency support for people leaving state institutions like prisons, NHS services or the care system to have a safe and stable home, or targeted help for people starting to build up rent arrears.
- Crisis prevention: measures taken in the current statutory window (56 days risk of homelessness) that avert more immediate homelessness threat, e.g. mediation services to sustain tenancies that are otherwise viable or help to find a new tenancy if an existing one is about to breakdown.

Support can also help with rapid rehousing. Guidance from Scotland on rapid rehousing said these approaches are about a "housing led approach for rehousing people that have experienced homelessness, making sure they reach a settled housing option as quickly as possible rather than staying in temporary accommodation for too long."<sup>6</sup> To do this the Welsh Homelessness Action

<sup>2</sup> Bramley, G. (2018) *Housing supply requirements across Great Britain: for low-income households and homeless people*. London: Crisis and National Housing Federation

<sup>3</sup> Crisis blog (2021) 'The next Welsh Government can take action to end homelessness / Gall Llywodraeth Cymru nesaf gymryd camau i roi diwedd ar ddigartrefedd', published 27 April 2021  
<https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/the-crisis-blog/welsh-parliament-senedd-election-homelessness-2021/>

<sup>4</sup> Homelessness Action Group (2020) *The framework of policies, approaches and plans needed to end homelessness in Wales (What ending homelessness in Wales looks like)*, p.22  
[https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-03/homelessness-action-group-report-march-2020\\_0.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-03/homelessness-action-group-report-march-2020_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Homelessness Action Group (2020) *The framework of policies, approaches and plans needed to end homelessness in Wales (What ending homelessness in Wales looks like)*, pp.7-8

<sup>6</sup> Social Bite (2018) *Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans: Guidance for Local Authorities and Partners*. Accessed 21 January 2020 on [https://social-bite.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/07/Rapid\\_Rehousing\\_Guidance1.1.pdf](https://social-bite.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/07/Rapid_Rehousing_Guidance1.1.pdf)

Group recommended, for example, ensuring social housing allocation policies give a reasonable preference to people experiencing homelessness and that providers phase out evictions into homelessness from social housing.

Other barriers include parts of the law that stop people accessing the vital support they need to leave homelessness. Crisis found that in 2019-20 three in 10 people who were homeless and otherwise eligible for support did not qualify for help to be rehoused because of the tests that exist in law (priority need, intentionality and local connection).<sup>7</sup>

**Therefore, we recommend that when looking at the pledge to build 20,000 new, low carbon social homes for rent the committee takes a close interest in how this works together with the fundamental reform of homelessness services. The ultimate outcome should be more people who are on low incomes and people experiencing homelessness having increased access to social homes and to the support they need to start and maintain a tenancy.**

## **2) Rough sleeping and people in emergency and temporary accommodation due to the pandemic**

Extraordinary work across Wales during the Covid-19 pandemic kept thousands of people safe in emergency and temporary accommodation (more than 12,400 between the start of the pandemic and June 2021)<sup>8</sup> and ensured some people were helped for the first time as barriers to support were lifted. **This pandemic response showed that with direction and resources from Welsh Government, and joint work delivered by local councils and partners across Wales, we could ensure that in the short term nobody was left without a safe place to stay.**

Crisis' *No One Left Out* report looked at the barriers to accessing support that people have faced and spoke to councils and service providers across Wales about their experiences during the pandemic.<sup>9</sup> We heard from services, local authorities and people experiencing homelessness that – while posing significant challenges – the Covid-19 response had some positive results. This included working with many individuals who had prolonged experiences of homelessness for the first time, including many accessing treatment services and with mental health support, with positive results. A housing options services manager at a local council said:

*“Especially during the [pandemic], we’ve had a lot of our returning single male customers, and obviously this time they’ve been accommodated. And in some ways, that’s quite a*

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<sup>7</sup> Gwilym-Taylor, R. and Sanders, B. (2021) *No one left out: The reality of eligibility barriers for people facing homelessness in Wales*, p.20 [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244820/no\\_one\\_left\\_out\\_report\\_2021\\_english-welsh.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244820/no_one_left_out_report_2021_english-welsh.pdf)

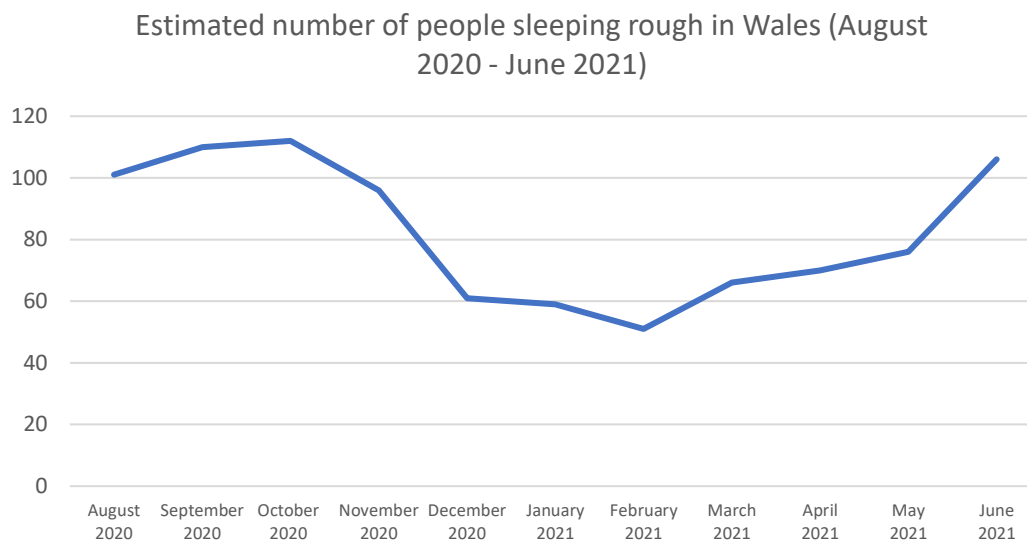
<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government statistics, *Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping: June 2021*, published September 2021; <https://gov.wales/homelessness-accommodation-provision-and-rough-sleeping-June-2021>

<sup>9</sup> Gwilym-Taylor, R. and Sanders, B. (2021) *No one left out: The reality of eligibility barriers for people facing homelessness in Wales* [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244820/no\\_one\\_left\\_out\\_report\\_2021\\_english-welsh.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244820/no_one_left_out_report_2021_english-welsh.pdf)

positive thing, because you do feel now that you can actually do something to help these people.”<sup>10</sup>

We recognise that this approach has also presented huge challenges for service providers and for people staying in emergency accommodation. Crisis’ own services handled some of these challenges, which included addressing digital exclusion, where we had to ensure people in emergency accommodation were given digital devices to access essential services and public health information; and helping people access basic mental health and wellbeing support.<sup>11</sup>

Statistics from June 2021 show that there were almost 6,500 people in temporary accommodation across Wales, including almost 250 dependent children.<sup>12</sup> At the same time the number of people entering temporary accommodation has exceeded the number being supported out of it, and into long-term accommodation, in every month since August 2020 except March 2021. Over the same time period rough sleeping has fallen by 25% since August 2020 but has been rising slowly again since February 2021. However, the overall rough sleeping rate is hugely reduced compared with before the pandemic.<sup>13</sup> See graph below for the trend since August 2020:



Source: Welsh Government statistics, *Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping: June 2021*

**As Covid-19 cases increase across many parts of Wales in September 2021 we recommend the committee continues to look at the Covid-19 ‘exit strategy’ for homelessness in Wales with the need to balance immediate action to keep people safe and prevent rough sleeping, with the longer-term actions that will help end homelessness.** Overall the priority interventions should be:

<sup>10</sup> Gwilym-Taylor, R. and Sanders, B. (2021) *No one left out: The reality of eligibility barriers for people facing homelessness in Wales* [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244820/no\\_one\\_left\\_out\\_report\\_2021\\_english-welsh.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244820/no_one_left_out_report_2021_english-welsh.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Boobis, S. and Albanese, F. (2020) *The impact of COVID-19 on people facing homelessness and service provision across Great Britain*. London: Crisis

<sup>12</sup> Welsh Government statistics, *Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping: June 2021*

<sup>13</sup> Welsh Government (2021) **Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping: May 2021** <https://gov.wales/homelessness-accommodation-provision-and-rough-sleeping-May-2021>

- Effective homelessness prevention for those experiencing pressure, such as tenancy support, grants and signposting to information and advice.
- The ongoing emergency support for people sleeping rough or in unsafe accommodation to reach self-contained emergency accommodation.
- Continuing Covid-19 vaccination roll-out to people potentially more exposed to the risk, including people facing homelessness.
- Ensuring timely move-on to longer-term accommodation for those currently in emergency accommodation; and deeper reforms to services to achieve rapid rehousing as the default approach for most people experiencing homelessness.