

RS 04
Ymchwiliad i gysgu ar y stryd yng Nghymru
Inquiry into rough sleeping in Wales
Ymateb gan: Huggard
Response from: Huggard

Key statistics in 2017:

In 2017 Huggard has:

- seen over 23,000 visits to our centre*
- worked with over 1,500 unique individuals*
- supported 803 individuals who were sleeping rough while accessing our services*
- provided emergency accommodation to 754 individuals*
- accommodated 129 people in our hostel and houses*
- helped 71 people into homes in the private rented sector*

- helped 407 people to move into more sustainable accommodation
- raised £1.8m in benefits for homeless people
- directly responded to over 50 medical emergencies involving homeless people, through our in-house First Responder Scheme - supported by the Welsh Ambulance Service
- supported 80 people with substance misuse issues into treatment services
- ran 1,203 development sessions involving 629 individuals (representing a 99% increase on 2016)
- helped to meet the basic needs of Cardiff's rough sleepers, every day of the year, in 2017.

Responses to the Committee's terms of reference:

1. The effectiveness of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act in preventing rough sleeping:

The provisions in Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act have been welcomed and there is evidence that a significant number of people have benefitted from the enhanced duties under the Act, and that this has prevented homelessness for many. However, it is clear that over the past two years, in particular, the numbers of people rough sleeping and engaging in street culture activities has risen within the Welsh capital.

There is a danger that rough sleeping, street culture activities and lack of access to accommodation can be perceived to have a simple causal relationship, when the reality is more complex.

While access to good quality and affordable accommodation is a major issue affecting housing and homelessness across Wales and certainly within Cardiff, to those rough sleeping on the streets, the major barrier can be one of sustaining rather than obtaining accommodation.

In addressing this, we need to better support people with complex lives, recognising that needs go beyond housing, the absence of which is often a symptom of other issues such as substance misuse, poor physical and mental health, and institutionalisation as well as learning difficulties, family/domestic violence and adverse childhood experiences. Often it is a combination of a number of these issues which can generate a cycle of low self-esteem and confidence, hopelessness, despair and isolation.

2. The scale of rough sleeping in Wales and the adequacy of data:

- Potentially there are problems with 'snapshot' data collection to report on rough sleeping statistics. The intermittent nature of some peoples' need to sleep on the streets can hide the extent of the issue. In addition the 'gravitational pull' of street culture activities, particularly in Cardiff where street begging can be financially rewarding - particularly at night, can draw people onto the streets who have access to suitable accommodation. Snapshots also lack the sophistication to show changing numbers of individuals over time as often they will count people anonymously and fail to count those that are avoiding being seen. Therefore, data from services engaging and working with individuals need to be looked at to identify numbers, trends and to help identify need.

Working in the centre of Cardiff, Huggard has a very high engagement rate with people rough sleeping in the city and we keep database records of housing status, support needs and help provided to people that use our service. In 2017, Huggard worked with 803 unique individuals who had slept rough in the city the night before visiting our service. Of these 803 individuals, 426 were new to sleeping on the streets and had not presented to Huggard as sleeping rough prior to January 2017. Back in 2015, Huggard worked with a total of 525 unique rough sleepers and this shows that, as a service, we have seen a 53% growth in rough sleepers presenting to our service in just two years.

3. The causes of rough sleeping and of the apparent recent increases in rough sleeping:

There are a number of factors that are currently having a negative impact on rough sleeping and the apparent recent increases in rough sleeping and there is a clear interrelationship between a number of factors including, but not limited to:

- Welfare reforms
- A significant increase in substance misuse issues
- The 'gravitational pull' of street culture activities

Welfare reforms: Conditions attached to Job Seekers Allowance and access to Support and Employment Allowance, together with sanctions imposed on clients is currently a major part of Huggard's advocacy work with clients. Struggling to maintain benefit income, many individuals will resort to begging and rough sleeping, disengaging from the system if they find themselves without adequate help and support. In 2017, Huggard gained £1.8m in benefits that homeless individuals were entitled to, enabling potential access to accommodation through a Housing Benefit claim, and taking away the need to rely on street culture activities as an only form of income. Welfare reform is also a significant barrier to the increased number of individuals who now have no recourse to public funds.

A significant increase in substance misuse issues: Between 2014/15 and 2016/17, Huggard saw a 93% increase in the use of heroin among the homeless

community. These figures correlate with the increases seen in begging and rough sleeping in the city. This has had significant impact on rough sleeping due to the following:

- The money required to meet an addiction of this nature requires an individual to engage in street culture activities, e.g. begging, street based sex work.
- Individuals need to spend a large amount of time generating income, and some of the most lucrative times for those begging are late at night when people are leaving clubs and pubs in the city centre. This then requires them to stay on the street at night.
- The only accommodation that is often suitable for someone with a chronic substance misuse issue is emergency overnight accommodation that is closely supervised. Within these environments projects, at this current time, are unable to allow clients to take illicit substances and will need to exclude them if caught. This forces individuals back onto the street and breaks the engagement with services. This in turn increases the harm caused to the individual and also impacts on wider community safety.

In the past 6 months we have seen an increase in the chronic use of New Psychoactive Substances (NPSs) or SPICE as it is commonly called. This is on one hand reducing heroin use but on the other is creating greater challenges to engagement in services due to almost constant altered states of consciousness and high levels of unpredictable behaviours and levels of aggression. We are currently seeking to develop an informed response to this in our harm reduction and first responder services.

The gravitational pull of street culture activities: Cardiff as a city, and as the Capital of Wales, benefits from a significant sense of community and belonging. This manifests itself through a caring and generous approach to those finding themselves homeless and living on the streets. This is coupled by a public suspicion, informed (or misinformed) by direct observation that “not enough is being done” to address this significant social issue. The result is that begging on the streets in Cardiff can enable an individual to generate significant levels of income. As numbers begging on the street increases, so does public concern and generosity, and this in turn increases the gravitational pull. Huggard will often see and work with individuals that have secured supported accommodation being drawn back to the streets very quickly in order to regain previous income levels. We have seen significant numbers of cases where people have gone on to abandoning their accommodation and returning to sleeping rough. Some individuals will be compelled to engage in late night begging, and sleeping rough, instead of engaging with emergency accommodation services. Public generosity together with organised street ‘handouts’ can provide nightly sustenance to individuals but in turn perpetuate their long term homelessness by diverting away from services that can help to not only meet immediate basic needs but combine this with sustainable solutions to breaking an individual’s cycle of homelessness.

4. The effectiveness and availability of services including emergency accommodation:

The availability of emergency accommodation is vital in providing a safe place and for starting a process of engagement with a rough sleeper with complex issues. In Cardiff there are a range of providers offering emergency accommodation, including the council, homelessness charities and churches. These services are all well used. Despite there still being numbers of individuals sleeping rough within Cardiff all of the providers have carried vacancies within their provision. The range of different organisations providing the services indicates that this is not a problem with one particular provider, or one set of 'rules' or even a particular cohort of clients accommodated in one place. It suggests that there are other factors that influence why spaces are not taken up.

Some individuals will find themselves excluded from emergency provision for anti-social behaviour including substance misuse. The necessary communal sleeping areas and close supervision of emergency accommodation means that it is difficult for services to accommodate individuals arriving late or coming and going throughout the night. This creates a barrier to those compelled to engage in begging or street based sex work during the night and also creates a significant barrier to those needing to feed addictions during the night, who will face exclusion if caught using substances on premises.

Every effort is made, within Huggard's emergency accommodation to try and maintain access to individuals arriving late or needing to leave during the night. However, this has to be managed without creating a disturbance to other users of the service, so is not always possible.

Many users of emergency accommodation in Cardiff experience complex and often chaotic lives. Of the 754 individuals accommodated by Huggard in our emergency accommodation in 2017, 278 were moved on to more sustainable accommodation. The majority of the rest failed to maintain engagement in accommodation services.

Huggard provides a range of highly effective low threshold support with particular expertise on development work, advocacy and substance misuse/harm reduction services. Despite these services achieving positive outcomes for those who find it hardest to engage in services, we have been unable to extend our advocacy or substance misuse services to meet the demands placed upon them. Working with the homeless community, Huggard runs the busiest needle exchange service across Cardiff and the Vale, averaging 30 transactions per day, and is the only needle exchange service operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Huggard is supporting the needle exchange provision through its own generated income (the equipment is provided to Huggard free of charge). We are funded to provide one advocacy post (£180 funding) and one substance misuse coordinator post (Open Access Engagement contract, through Sub Misuse APB) and we find it impossible to meet

the increased demand on these services, which should be extended to meet emerging needs, and to increase engagement and help stabilise those with chaotic lives.

It is a fundamental principle of low threshold services that they are provided at a location that is already used and has a good level of engagement with those that would benefit from them. With over 23,000 visits to the centre each year, it is unfortunate that we have not had the resources to extend these low threshold services to meet demand within Huggard's award winning facilities located on the same site as the Local Authority's Housing Options Centre, with which we work closely.

Beyond emergency accommodation, Huggard never has vacancies within its hostel and many people in emergency accommodation are waiting for suitable places, to meet their needs, in a frontline hostel within the city. The complexity of the issues faced within hostels is increasing which has meant that it is harder to progress support plans with residents to prepare them for supported housing or independent living. Huggard has vacancies within its supported houses and finds getting appropriate referrals, from those who can effectively manage a supported tenancy, difficult. When inappropriate referrals have been accepted this sets back other residents in a shared house environment and creates management, disrepair and neighbour/police issues. When someone is placed in a tenancy that they are unable to manage this undermines their self-confidence and further hinders future progression.

5. The steps to prevent and tackle rough sleeping in Wales:

Suggested steps include:

- Recognition and empathy that a lack of access to accommodation is not necessarily the barrier that causes rough sleeping.
- Support and promotion of low threshold support services that meet immediate needs as well as providing a gateway, not only to accommodation, but also to a range of social support, individual help and development opportunities.
- Steps to redirect the care and compassion shown by the public that is currently increasing the 'gravitational pull' of begging and is in turn prolonging and exacerbating rough sleeping through:
 - The development of 'whole community' homelessness charters that provide a shared set of values and principles based on care and respect for rough sleepers – supporting and developing actions and provisions that help people off the streets rather than keeping them there.
 - The development of diverted giving schemes – giving a channel for public financial donations that can go directly to those who need

financial help and also encouraging people to support the vital work of organisations who make a difference.

- Better public awareness of, and a better joined up approach from frontline homelessness providers, to demonstrate that help is there and is effective
- Ensure that there is adequate emergency accommodation provision and that this can lead into suitable hostel accommodation without significant delay
- Reduce the barriers to accessing emergency accommodation by:
 - reducing the rewards for rough sleepers engaging in the night-time economy
 - developing flexibility of access, where possible, to enable access at different times of the night
 - provision of enhanced harm reduction support and provision so that individuals needing to take substances are not excluded and forced back onto the streets
- Enhance advocacy services to help claim and maintain benefits, enabling access to HB dependent accommodation and to help prevent the loss of benefits and tenancies. This is particularly important with the impending introduction of Universal Credits.
- Enhance harm reduction services to:
 - continue to minimise the health risks to individuals and the wider public of drug use
 - provide accessible harm reduction advice to minimise the impact of substance misuse and promote better engagement
 - make appropriate supervised provision for those taking drugs to facilitate engagement, reduce exclusion from services, minimise drug related death and other serious health risks, reduce peer pressure that has resulted in the increased use of drugs among rough sleepers and, increase public safety by reducing public drug use, drug litter and related anti-social behaviours.
 - Guide people toward treatment and recovery services at their own pace, using a low threshold environment to begin a support and reflection process and enabling engagement at the moment someone decides that they want help.

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