

RS 19

**Ymchwiliad i gysgu ar y stryd yng
Nghymru Inquiry into rough sleeping in
Wales Ymateb gan: Grŵp pobl
Response from:Pobl Group**

1. Summary of recommendations –

- a) The Supporting People budget should remain ringfenced
- b) The Homeless Prevention Grant should remain ringfenced, but focus on rough sleeper services, be commissioned via Regional Collaborative Committees and monitored by relevant local SP teams
- c) Commitment to the widespread implementation of Housing First services should be made at Government level
- d) Smaller scale services that enable people to rapidly access a greater variety of emergency accommodation at points of crisis should be considered
- e) Services should be designed to be easily accessed by couples and people with pets
- f) Welsh Government and Local Authorities should engage directly with people sleeping rough via objective parties to gain evidence of the efficacy of systems and services
- g) Duties should be given to Local Authorities for publishing monthly reports of the levels of people rough sleeping and details of services provided for them in their area
- h) Under a national framework to address rough sleeping, a coordinated local/regional approach is required. This needs to involve all key agencies and individuals (particularly providers of outreach services, housing, support services, police and health [mental health, substance misuse and community nursing])
- i) Access to substance misuse services needs to be much quicker and flexible to assist people sleeping rough

2. This written evidence has been produced on behalf of the Pobl Group. The Pobl Group provide support to more than 9,000 people every year via more than 125 services across Wales. The Pobl Group manages more than 16,000 homes throughout Wales and plan on building 3,000 more over the next 5 years.

3. Pobl are committed to ending homelessness and are submitting this evidence to provide a view that incorporates our position as a provider of homes and support services to people with complex needs who are affected by street homelessness.

4. Supporting People funds are integral to providing services that prevent people from becoming or have become street homeless. The potential for the removal of the ringfencing of the Supporting People grant poses a significant risk to the increase in the numbers of people rough sleeping in Wales continuing.

5. Alongside Cymorth Cymru and other service providers within the sector, we have provided significant evidence to Welsh Government on the impact of the potential changes to the SP programme. Most notably, we are concerned about the potential for the dilution of the ability for effective services to be provided to people with the most complex needs, who are at the greatest risk of rough sleeping.

6. Services which are provided by the Homeless Prevention Grant are varying in their remit and scope. We think the most effective use of the funds to achieve a reduction in people who are rough sleeping services are pre-prison release programmes, bond schemes, street based outreach and day-centre services.

7. Services that provide through Homeless Prevention Grant funding are currently provided on a year-to-year basis, which does not enable long-term strategic planning of the delivery of the services or to adapt to changes in demand or need.

8. Services are not monitored at a local level, with reviews of Homeless Prevention Grant funded services only taking place twice per year, with little or no scrutiny at a service level. We believe that Homeless Prevention Grant could deliver more effective services if they were commissioned on a regional basis through the Regional Collaborative Committees and their performance monitored by the respective Local Authority Supporting People teams.

9. We believe that having a home is a right and not a privilege. The current system of a staircase approach to accessing housing that takes people from rough sleeping to supported housing and eventually having their own home is a good model and has worked for many people, but is not the best model available.

10. The causes of homelessness are as varied as the people who are affected by it, therefore a one-size fits all approach is not the most effective way of providing support. We believe that choice on the type of support available and the location of their housing is integral to long term sustainable solutions to people rough sleeping with complex needs.

11. The causes of rough sleeping can include reasons stemming from childhood as well as more immediate reasons, such as eviction and relationship breakdown. We believe it is helpful for people working to address rough sleeping to be trained in trauma informed practice and solutions focused approaches to enable them to support people sleeping rough in a sensitive and empathetic manner to help them to use their own skills and abilities.

12. Rough sleeping and homelessness are not just housing issues. Consequently, we believe that under a national Rough Sleeping Action Plan there should be well-coordinated local/regional approaches to addressing rough sleeping which involve all key agencies and individuals (such as local authority housing and social services departments, housing associations, third sector support providers, police and criminal justice services, health (particularly substance misuse, mental health and community nurse services) and faith/humanitarian/'soup run' services for people sleeping rough.

13. A coordinated approach should reduce contradictions between services, improve consistency and enable meaningful sharing of information. The burgeoning Rough Sleepers Charter in Cardiff, being led by The Huggard and Cardiff City Council, is a good example of this type of coordinated approach. Groups such as Rough Sleepers Cymru, working in collaboration with Regional Collaborative Committees, should lead on these actions with the direction and support of Welsh Government.

14. There is patchy provision of outreach services working with people sleeping rough in Wales. We believe that proactive outreach services are required in more areas as part of a coordinated approach and that these should usually operate for 7 days a week.

15. Pobl are committed to the widespread adoption of the Housing First model throughout Wales. Housing First has the lowest rate level of attrition and highest levels of tenancy retention of any methods of delivering services to homeless people with complex needs, by removing the many points of potential failure in the staircase approach.

16. A significant amount of evidence of the efficacy of Housing First is available from established projects around the world, most notably New York, Finland and Canada. Pobl would like to support Welsh Government to be at the forefront of housing policy in the UK through widespread re-modelling of existing services to adopt the principles of Housing First. Recommendations for the widespread scaling up of Housing First projects have been made throughout the UK by Joseph Rowntree Foundation¹, Centre for Social Justice² and Crisis³.

17. In partnerships with Cymorth Cymru, Pobl has established the "Housing First Network Cymru" and will be utilising this resource as an opportunity help share good practice, encourage cooperation from landlords and service providers, as well as encourage consistent methods of review and assessment of the efficacy of Housing First services in Wales.

¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/we-can-solve-poverty-uk>

² <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/housing-first-housing-led-solutions-rough-sleeping-homelessness>

³ <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/housing-models-and-access/housing-first-feasibility-study-for-liverpool-city-region-2017/>

18. Our experience has found that the effectiveness of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act in preventing rough sleeping varies greatly between local authorities and is dependent on the availability of services in that area. The ability to rapidly place people who have a need for emergency housing is key in preventing people from resorting to rough sleeping. The right service(s) should be made available at the right time, which is a core principle for Housing First services.

19. The Housing (Wales) Act includes priority needs groups of homeless people for the provision of accommodation. People sleeping rough are often the furthest away from any form of suitable accommodation and yet are not included on the list of priority needs groups. We believe that people sleeping rough should be added to the list of groups included as having a priority need. In addition, the removal of priority need status for former prisoners should be reviewed and reinstated.

20. Many services exclude couples and people who have pets. Service users have advised that many of them choose to remain street homeless than be unable to access services with their partner or pet, leading to increases in rough sleeping and a resistance to engagement with services from these people. We need appropriate and accessible accommodation which respect and reflect the strengths and positives that key personal relationships can bring to people's lives.

21. Pobl have introduced small scale (less than 10 units) emergency accommodation spaces alongside our existing supported housing and floating support services. We have found that the scale of these projects and working alongside established projects have led to positive engagement from people rough sleeping and have led to them successfully accessing longer-term supported housing.

22. Larger scale projects that provide emergency accommodation to people who are rough sleeping are not always conducive environments to enabling people to find safety, reduce risks and increase strengths and resilience. Some projects are deemed too unsafe by those who have a need to access emergency accommodation and instead choose to sleep rough.

23. The safety of these projects has been compromised by the widespread use of Novel Psychotic Substances (NPS) such as Spice, which leads to wildly unpredictable behaviour from the users, as well as an increase in overdoses. This unpredictable behaviour leads to people being banned or evicted from supported or emergency accommodation services, which in turn results in increases in rough sleeping for people who have acute substance misuse issues.

24. We believe that that substance misuse in supported or temporary accommodation is an issue that should be approached from the perspective of harm reduction and an elastic tolerance strategy should be used when managing the behaviour of people who have need to use substances. Non-exclusion policies should be utilised in services providing emergency accommodation for people with complex needs.

25. A working group of substance misuse professionals and academics are gathering evidence for the introduction of Enhanced Harm Reduction Centres (EHRCs) will provide much needed insight into an established and evidence based method of preventing drug related deaths and encourage engagement with treatment services.

26. Often many people sleeping rough have very significant substance misuse issues. There is limited quick and easy access to substance misuse services to assist people who wish to address this issue. We would welcome the introduction of very responsive substance misuse services to help people sleeping rough at the time they require it. The services need to be flexible and persistent to meet people's needs; e.g. taking services to people sleeping rough as well as offering building-based services

27. The systems currently in place to provide emergency accommodation do not work as effectively as they could for everyone. We believe that people accessing emergency accommodation services are in the most authoritative position to design the systems that will work best for them. People in these situations will have no hesitation in speaking the truth to power and giving honest accounts of their experiences.

28. More could be done by Government and Local Authority to directly engage with people rough sleeping. This approach would replace the current process of engaging with service users via the charities whose existence relies upon the continuation of funding. More regular direct engagement via objective parties such as universities or Government researchers would provide a clearer picture of the situation faced by people trying to access services designed to get them off the streets.

29. The scale of rough sleeping in Wales and the adequacy of official data has relied upon the "one night rough sleeper counts" facilitated by Local Authorities. This is a snapshot of the scale of the issues and does not adequately represent the true situation of people sleeping rough throughout Wales. The production of independent rough sleeper statistics by homelessness charities gives an alternative view on the situation, however these could be critiqued as lacking in objectivity owing to their reliance on continued funding.

30. To bridge these two issues, clear duties could instead be placed on Local Authorities to produce and publish regular (monthly) reports of the number of people sleeping rough and the actions that are being taken to prevent people from continuing to sleep rough in their area. As previously suggested, this would support the monitoring of the performance of organisations delivering services directly to rough sleepers by local SP teams.

31. We would like to offer an open invitation for members of the Inquiry Committee to meet with us to discuss how we can support Welsh Government to deliver a largescale adoption of Housing First services throughout Wales. We believe that by using the Housing First model, we can end street homelessness in Wales forever.

Yours sincerely,

Rhian Stone
Director