



# Developing homelessness provision in Wales

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## 1 Background

In July 2009 representatives of Rough Sleepers Cymru, Cymorth Cymru and the Homelessness Network met with Jocelyn Davies AM, Deputy Minister for Housing, to propose that homelessness services in Wales should be supported in implementing developments similar to those brought about by the *Places of Change* (PoC) agenda in England.

This programme, supported by considerable capital investment from central government, provided English services with the opportunity to transform 'traditional' homelessness projects, such as rough sleeper hostels, into 'Places of Change' – physically transforming buildings to create more open, welcoming environments, enhancing services' training and employment roles, and encouraging closer links with local communities. The thinking behind the programme was to better support service users in ending cycles of homelessness by breaking down social barriers and maximising opportunities to develop the skills, opportunities and confidence needed to successfully take up more independent accommodation.

These principles are already very familiar to many homelessness services in Wales, and considerable work has been going on in this area for many years. However, without the substantial investment that English services have seen, agencies here have not been able to implement change on the scale that they would wish to. The group suggested to the Deputy Minister that the provision of additional capital funding would have the potential to bring about considerable benefits to the nature and quality of many homelessness services in Wales, and agreed to produce a report setting out some of the key issues.

This report is based on feedback from members of Rough Sleepers Cymru, Cymorth Cymru and the Homelessness Network, and is intended to:

- Provide an outline of some of the 'PoC-type' developments that Wales has seen in recent years
- Describe any ideas for further service developments
- Consider funding implications

## 2.1 Recent developments in Wales

Providers noted a number of developments they have been able to bring in over recent years:

- 2.1.1 Swansea Cyrenians has developed training, recycling, arts and health day services that have enhanced homeless people's skills and quality of life, and assisted them in overcoming barriers to employment and resettlement.
- 2.1.2 The Salvation Army has embraced the Places of Change agenda via its Hostel Plus programme in the UK. In Wales this has been slightly more difficult (lack of capital funding), though the Northlands redevelopment fully reflects the PoC agenda with education, training and employment activities on site – including the development of business units which work in partnership with hostel programmes.
- 2.1.3 Pembrokeshire Action for the Single Homeless (PASH) is working to set up a social lettings agency – funds are not yet secured, though the hope is to establish a service that will work with local landlords to provide quality, well-maintained accommodation to people in housing need.
- 2.1.4 United Welsh Housing Association (UWHA) has several schemes providing apprenticeships (eg, painting and decorating) through contractors, though these have been more difficult to set up within homelessness projects.

However, the association's Cardiff homelessness hostel is the base for a *fruit and veg co-op*, and over the past few months plans the project has been exploring the possibility of establishing a pathway scheme and taskforce scheme to support residents into work (discussed below), funding permitting.

- 2.1.5 Cardiff YMCA has developed two key services which support the PoC agenda:

Design for Life is a drop-in resource and training centre for service users. It focuses on providing support with job searches, CV writing, IT access and training, and promoting access to training and volunteering. It also involves a social programme.

The Work Incentive Scheme provides support to residents who are in employment (including volunteering) or training for more than sixteen hours a week, and motivates others to take up such opportunities. Participants are exempted from paying hostel service charges, and receive other support such as the provision on packed lunches to further bring down living costs and make employment, etc, a more viable opportunity.

2.1.6 A partnership of organisations including Llamau, Clwyd Alyn, Trothwy, Hafan, the Swansea Young Single Homeless Project and The Wallich has worked with Cymorth to develop and pilot Tai Dysgu a Gwaith (TDG). The principle informing this is that homeless people must be provided with opportunities to access high quality education and training in order to develop new skills, build confidence and independence, and successfully move forward in their lives. TDG was also established on the principle that in many cases these opportunities can most effectively be delivered within the homelessness service itself, where staff and service users have established relationships, and courses can be carefully tailored in the context of individuals' wider circumstances and plans.

## 2.2 Further ideas from homelessness service providers

There are a great many ideas for developments in homelessness services across Wales, many of which reflect innovative and pragmatic responses to local environments and opportunities. For example:

2.2.1 The Salvation Army's Ty Gobaith in Cardiff is seeking to refurbish and adapt its reception area (currently closed off behind glass) along PoC lines, and re-establish the area in an open plan design. They also wish to establish social enterprises linked to the hostel, such as a mobile lunch service for local businesses, a bicycle repair service, and a Portable Appliance Testing scheme.

2.2.2 Pembrokeshire Action for the Single Homeless (PASH) seeks to purchase a farm to enable the development of a local produce business and provide training in building and maintenance, as well as animal welfare, etc. Linking the training with a local college and other potential partners, they would also look at providing horse riding for disadvantaged groups, and the sale of sports good which are in demand in the local area - riding, surfing, etc.

2.2.3 The Huggard Centre has ambitions to develop a series of social enterprises run by service users, serving their local community and generating income for the organisation. These include a cafe, a bicycle sales and repair shop, and charity clothing shop.

2.2.4 Swansea Cyrenians seeks to upgrade its out-dated direct access accommodation, which has little adaptability or space to fully meet the needs of homeless people and is inadequate for disabled users. The building needs to be adapted to provide high quality en-suite accommodation units, with training and resource areas onsite linked directly to other training sites, job-search and employment support agencies, etc.

The organisation also wishes to build on its current social enterprise programme by setting set up a range of further initiatives to benefit homeless and other excluded people, including painting and decorating,

food delivery, boat-building, creative industries (such as an image library), information and communication technologies, website services and a food co-operative. Some of these have already been successfully piloted, though funding to get them more solidly established is currently unavailable.

- 2.2.5 Cardiff Women's Aid is looking to develop and re-designate accommodation to deliver a specialist refuge for service users with drug/alcohol-related problems and/or mental health issues, in order to offer a greater range of choice and tailored support for vulnerable people

The organisation also has ideas for social enterprises that would allow it to create revenue and surpluses that could be re-invested into frontline services.

- 2.2.6 United Welsh Housing Association considers that the reception areas in many of its hostels have an 'institutional' feel which is out of sync with current best practice. The organisation wishes to redesign these areas with a more open-plan approach, though funding has not yet been identified.

UWHA also wants to expand the fruit and veg co-operative, run from Oak House in partnership with the Welsh Rural Regeneration fund, which enables people to access local, affordable fruit and vegetables. The hope is eventually to offer this service to all hostels in the Cardiff area, though at this stage transport and staffing costs are probative.

Finally, the organisation wants to develop employment and training opportunities in the building and maintenance industries for residents (and former residents) of its accommodation projects. A 'Pathways Scheme' would provide a planned route for residents to access the building trade in the future, placing trainees with the organisation's contractors in an accredited programme designed to develop individuals' skills and confidence. A 'taskforce scheme' would look at developing a lower level, 'soft skills' programme of work experience, including aspects of buildings maintenance. Both of these schemes could be linked to rent and deposit scheme, supporting those involved in training and employment to access private sector accommodation.

- 2.2.7 North Wales Housing Association seeks to set up a service in partnership with voluntary organisations, local businesses and local government to provide 'tasters' of different types of work. The aim would be to provide young people with experience of different work environments, to assist in the development of training pathways, etc.

- 2.2.8 YMCA would like to build on its Work Incentive Scheme (above) by providing an in-house training/work facility in practical skills. This would not be limited to use by the organisation's service users, but could be accessed by, and benefit, the wider community.

## 2.3 Funding

Significant advances could be made with capital funding alone – particularly with regards to improving the quality of accommodation and addressing issues such as out-dated, ‘institutional’-style buildings - though there is a sense among some providers that revenue investment would greatly assist in the establishment of social enterprise projects, which may not immediately generate income.

The following comments were made:

*In the case of Cyrenians Paxton St, huge progress could be achieved by capital funding alone, since the revenue budget is already met by Supporting People.*

*All three Salvation Army centres in Cardiff are trying to set up social enterprise schemes, and fully expect one or two to be realised this financial year. The issue is start-up costs and break-even point for the enterprise.*

*With capital and revenue funding we feel that UWHA’s goals would be achievable and have a positive effect on homelessness services in terms of lowering bed-blocking in hostels. They would also reduce the demand on social housing, and give people real options on accessing the private sector housing market. [...] The main obstacles to this have been accessing funding to develop the schemes to ensure that they can remain self sufficient over a long period of time. Capital funding would be welcomed to assist in getting these types of schemes up and running in the first place, but to truly make them sustainable we feel that linked revenue funding would be of great assistance.*

*Additional capital funding would allow us [Cardiff Women’s Aid] to upgrade our refuge accommodation across the board more quickly (though this may involve moving some of our houses - not a bad thing as they become too well known over time). But further capital spend would also allow us to develop and re-designate our accommodation to deliver specialist refuge for substance misuse service users and those with mental health issues, thus offering a greater range of choice and tailored support for service users.*

*Our organisation [Cardiff YMCA] would like to improve the physical environment we offer by converting some units to self catering. Capital funding would provide this with no need for further revenue funding.*

## 3 Conclusions

Homelessness services across Wales have demonstrated considerable innovation in developing new and effective approaches to supporting vulnerable people. These innovations have brought about significant benefits to service users, and many have ideas and ambitions to achieve even greater success.

However, many of these ambitions are hampered by financial constraints. In particular, agencies require greater access to capital funding in order to carry out works programmes to improve the environments their services are delivered in, and to support the establishment of social enterprises which would later become a source of revenue.

#### **4 Recommendations**

The economic downturn in Wales (as in the rest of the UK) is impacting on social policy agendas in a number of ways. With regards to homelessness, evidence from Cymorth Cymru members and from Shelter Cymru demonstrates that rising unemployment, debt and repossessions are already leading to greater demands on homelessness and housing advice services. In addition, secondary issues associated with rising financial concerns, such as relationship breakdowns and problems with alcohol or drugs, appear also to be rising.

We anticipate that this situation will continue at least for the coming few years, further increasing demands on homelessness services, and creating the risk that, for many of those affected, recovery may take a great deal of time. We would therefore argue that the need to support homelessness services in developing more innovative and effective interventions has never been more urgent than it is now.

Through the Essex Review, the Welsh Assembly Government and its partners are considering how the Social Housing Grant (SHG) should be allocated and administered in the future. One recommendation put forward within the Review is that the majority of SHG is handed over to local authorities for the development of general needs social housing, whilst a national pot for more specialised accommodation and nationally identified priorities is retained by the Assembly. We support this proposal, and recommend that the type of projects described in this report are delivered through this mechanism.

This proposal would ensure that SHG does not only serve the needs of families and individuals in general needs housing across Wales, but also benefits more vulnerable people who are experiencing acute housing need.

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