

# Senedd 2021: A manifesto for ending homelessness



## About Cymorth Cymru

**Cymorth Cymru is the representative body for providers of homelessness, housing and support services in Wales.**

Our members provide a wide range of services that support people to overcome tough times, rebuild their confidence and live independently in their own homes. This includes people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, young people and care leavers, older people, people fleeing violence against women, domestic abuse or sexual violence, people living with a learning disability, people experiencing mental health problems, people with substance misuse issues and many more.

We act as the voice of the sector, influencing the development and implementation of policy, legislation and practice that affects our members and the people they support. We are committed to working with people who use services, our members and partners to effect change. We believe that together, we can have a greater impact on people's lives.

We want to be part of a social movement that ends homelessness and creates a Wales where everyone can live safely and independently in their own homes and thrive in their communities.



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## **Introduction**

**We are approaching the Senedd elections in the midst of a global pandemic, an ordeal that has magnified the inequalities faced by people without a safe, secure and affordable home. When we were told to ‘stay at home’ there was a stark realisation that this would prove impossible for people experiencing homelessness, and dangerous for those experiencing violence and abuse.**

However, the pandemic has also highlighted what can be achieved with a clear vision, principled leadership and the necessary funding and support. Thousands of people have been helped off the streets and out of unsuitable accommodation in order to keep them safe from COVID-19. Tens of thousands more have been supported to maintain their home, to avoid homelessness and to escape violence and abuse. Support services have been critical, adapting their delivery models to meet people’s needs under ever-changing government restrictions. Homelessness, housing and support workers have never been so important, and have undoubtedly helped to save many lives during this pandemic.

It is clear that the next Welsh Government has a huge opportunity to build on these incredible efforts and ensure that everyone in Wales has a safe, secure and affordable home, free from abuse. Incoming Ministers will have the chance to set Wales on a path to end homelessness and ensure that people have the support they need to live independently in their own homes and thrive in their communities.

In order to do this, the next Welsh Government must:

- 1. Implement the Homelessness Action Group recommendations**
- 2. Protect and increase the Housing Support Grant**
- 3. Deliver 20,000 energy efficient social homes**
- 4. Recognise and reward homelessness and support workers**
- 5. Improve access to mental health services**

**#1**

# **Implement the Homelessness Action Group recommendations**



## **Implement the Homelessness Action Group recommendations**

Established in June 2019, the Homelessness Action Group has published a series of **reports** which provide a roadmap for ending homelessness in Wales. While the Group's recommendations have all been accepted by the current Cabinet, full implementation requires a long-term commitment from the next Welsh Government.

As a member of the Homelessness Action Group, Cymorth Cymru held engagement events with people who had experience of homelessness, asking them for their views on how Wales could and should end homelessness. We owe it to them to ensure that their ideas become reality. The next Welsh Government must implement the Homelessness Action Group's recommendations in full, including:

### **★ Cross-government approach**

Homelessness is not just a housing issue, and a cross-government commitment will be critical to successful implementation of the Homelessness Action Group's recommendations. This includes universal prevention and early intervention, as well as targeted prevention, ensuring multi-agency support for mental health and substance use issues, and ensuring no-one becomes homeless after leaving hospital, care or prison.

### **★ Transformation of homelessness services**

One of the Group's key recommendations is to place rapid rehousing at the heart of the system for tackling homelessness, moving people into settled, secure and suitable homes as quickly as possible and reducing the reliance on emergency accommodation. This process has begun with the 'phase 2' response to COVID-19, but real transformation will take time and must have the support of the next Welsh Government.

### **★ Psychologically informed services**

We know that trauma has a huge impact on people's lives, evidenced by Public Health Wales **research** which shows that people with four or more adverse childhood experiences are 20 times more likely to be incarcerated and 14 times more likely to be a victim of violence than those with no ACEs. In order to mitigate the impact and break the cycle of trauma it is essential that all public services are psychologically-informed in their approach.

**#2**

## **Protect and increase the Housing Support Grant**



## **Protect and increase the Housing Support Grant**

**The Housing Support Grant is the primary funding stream for homelessness and housing-related support services in Wales. Supporting approximately 60,000 people every year, it prevents and alleviates homelessness, helps people to escape violence and abuse, and supports people to live independently in their own homes and thrive in their communities.**

Recent [research](#) conducted by Cardiff Metropolitan University shows that Housing Support Grant services deliver £300 million gross annual savings to public services in Wales by preventing homelessness, easing pressure on health and social care, and reducing interaction with the criminal justice system. This represents a net saving of £1.40 for every £1 invested by the Welsh Government. Importantly, the research also showed a sustained positive impact on people's health, wellbeing, confidence and optimism for the future.

We know that many people using homelessness services have significant experience of trauma, many have mental health problems and some have struggled with addiction. This makes accessing and maintaining a home more difficult - so well funded, high quality, trauma-informed support services are critical if we are to make homelessness history.

### **★ Increase the funding**

Local authorities, housing and support providers in Wales have made extraordinary efforts during the pandemic to provide people with emergency accommodation and support. An increased Housing Support Grant will be essential in the coming years to ensure that people can sustain their homes and avoid a return to the streets. We also need to ensure that support workers feel valued and receive fair pay for their exceptional work. However, this requires sustainable funding and certainty for local authority commissioners and service providers. It is critical that the Housing Support Grant is increased in line with inflation (as a minimum) throughout the next Senedd term.

### **★ Maintain the ring-fence**

Maintaining the ring-fence is absolutely critical to ensure that Housing Support Grant funding is directed to where it is needed. When the ring-fence was removed in England, the Auditor General found that spending was reduced by an average of 45% over four years. It is essential that we don't make the same mistake in Wales.

**#3**

**Deliver 20,000 energy  
efficient social homes**



## **Deliver 20,000 energy efficient social homes**

**Everyone should have a right to a safe, secure and affordable home. To make this a reality, the next Welsh Government must make a firm commitment to build and support the development of at least 20,000 new social homes.**

Shelter Cymru estimates that 67,000 households are on waiting lists for social housing across Wales and with over 10,000 people presenting as homeless every year, it's clear that there needs to be a sustained focus on social house building.

While housing of all tenures is key to ending homelessness, we know that social housing provides the most security of tenure and is more affordable for people on low incomes and/or reliant on the welfare system. While the Welsh Government has achieved its target of 20,000 'affordable' homes during this Senedd term, we are clear that the focus must be on social homes in the next term.

It's also important that social housing meets the needs of different groups of people, including young people who have their benefits capped at the shared accommodation rate, single people exiting homelessness, families and multi-generational households.

### **★ Provide the funding and support to build 20,000 new social homes**

The Welsh Government should commit to a 5-year social housing grant programme, ensuring that housing associations and local authorities have the funding they need to build 20,000 new social homes. The grant programme should encourage social landlords to allocate homes to people with experience of homelessness and continue their work to prevent evictions into homelessness. It should also meet different types of housing need, including for young people who receive lower housing-related benefits.

### **★ Support social landlords with de-carbonisation**

Tackling climate change should be a priority for the next Welsh Government, and this includes supporting the housing sector to play its part. De-carbonisation of the housing sector - including new builds and existing homes - will be critical, not only for reducing the impact on our climate, but also for reducing fuel poverty among tenants. This will require significant investment and the Welsh Government must provide a stimulus package that supports social landlords to make this a reality.

**#4**

**Recognise and reward  
homelessness and support  
workers**



## **Recognise and reward homelessness and support workers**

**Homelessness, housing and support workers have always been our greatest asset and this pandemic has shone a light on their incredible contribution to our society. It is time to ensure that their work is valued, recognised and rewarded.**

Over the past decade, public spending restrictions combined with growing pressures on services have meant little to no pay increases for support workers, despite the rising costs of living. At the same time, they have been doing incredibly challenging work, supporting people to overcome significant trauma, mental health problems and substance use issues. They have stayed focused and positive, supporting people to identify their strengths, develop their skills and transform their lives.

Recruitment and retention of high quality staff will be critical to ending homelessness, supporting people to live independently and protecting people from violence and abuse. Service providers must be resourced to improve pay, support and conditions.

### **★ Homelessness and housing support workers**

The next Welsh Government must do all it can to ensure that frontline support workers receive increased recognition and reward for their vital work. Ministers should resource the Housing Support Grant to facilitate this and encourage local authorities to commission services with enough funding for fair pay, staff wellbeing, reflective practice and psychological support to deal with vicarious trauma and burnout.

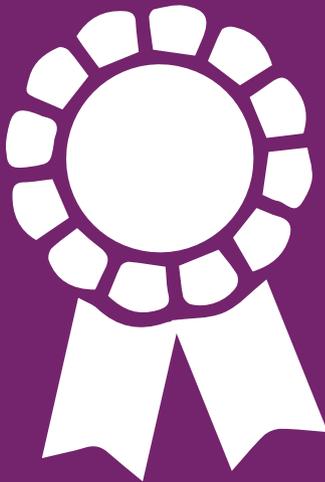
### **★ Social care workers**

We are supporting the [Pay Them Fairly](#) campaign, which has three core asks:

- The Real Living Wage must be implemented as a bare minimum, for all care workers in Wales.
- There must be funding for progression and differentials based on qualifications, skills and responsibilities.
- The Welsh Government must increase social care funding for local authorities to ensure the sector is driven by value, rather than cost, and has the resources needed to deliver improved outcomes for citizen users, the workforce and social value to communities.

**#5**

**Improve access to mental health services**



## **Improve access to mental health services**

Research for our [Health Matters](#) report in 2016 identified that 82% of people who presented to their homeless department had mental health problems. The research also identified several barriers to accessing health services, including waiting lists, not being able to get an appointment, and being refused access due to alcohol or drug issues.

In addition, Public Health Wales research indicates that 50% of people with experience of homelessness have had four or more adverse childhood experiences, which increases the likelihood of homelessness, mental health and substance use issues.

Building enough safe, secure and affordable homes is critical, but support for people's mental health is vital for maintaining tenancies and preventing homelessness. Access to psychological support is also critical in order to help people to deal with their experiences of trauma and break the cycle for future generations.

### **★ Improve access to NHS mental health services**

NHS mental health services should be accessible to everyone in Wales, including people with experience of homelessness. It is essential that these services are properly funded and supported to become more accessible to people with experience of homelessness.

### **★ Expand multi-disciplinary homelessness teams**

Multi-disciplinary homelessness teams with specialist mental health and substance use professionals have been effective in supporting people with co-occurring health issues. The next Welsh Government should continue to support the roll-out of this model, which takes health services to people experiencing homelessness, rather than expecting them to overcome the barriers to traditional health settings.

### **★ Fund specialist mental health housing support services**

Specialist mental health supported housing and tenancy support services have always existed to ensure that people with longer term mental health problems and/or mental illness have the specialist support they need. It's important that specialist services continue to be commissioned throughout the next Senedd term.



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