

Embargoed until: 18 May 2018

Public Accounts Committee backs Cymorth Cymru on calls to protect homelessness and housing support services.

The National Assembly's Public Accounts Committee has today published a report that highlights 'serious concerns' about the Welsh Government's proposals to merge the Supporting People Programme with a number of non-housing grants. Cymorth Cymru, the representative body for providers of homelessness and housing-related support services in Wales, has welcomed the Committee's report and has urged the Welsh Government to act on its recommendations.

The report is the result of the Committee's inquiry into the Supporting People Programme, which took oral and written evidence from Cymorth Cymru, Community Housing Cymru, several other homelessness and housing charities, local authorities, and the Welsh Government.

One of the key areas of focus for the Committee's report is the Welsh Government's proposal to merge Supporting People with nine other grants in 2019/20 to create an Early Intervention: Prevention and Support (EIPS) Grant. This would remove the ring-fence from Supporting People funding and merge it with a series of non-housing grants such as Flying Start, Families First, Communities First Legacy, Communities for Work Plus and Childcare and Play.

The housing sector has deep concerns that funding currently ring-fenced for homelessness and housing-related support services for marginalised groups could be lost to more politically popular services within the proposed EIPS grant such as early years, health visitors and childcare. There are widespread fears that there will be a diluted focus on homelessness at a time when we should be increasing our efforts to tackle it.

In its report, the Committee has stated:

- We have serious concerns about the Welsh Government's lack of engagement with the sector in developing its proposals and find it unacceptable that some stakeholders found themselves "kept in the dark".
- We have serious reservations about the timescales currently set out by the Welsh Government for evaluating the flexible funding pilots.
- We also share [the ELGC Committee's] concerns that removing the ring-fence from the Supporting People Programme Grant will impede the delivery of vital housing related support services, including those for rough sleepers.
- We are concerned with the Welsh Government's stated rationale for integrating existing grants may not take into account sufficiently the way the programme works with those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

A series of recommendations address these concerns, including:

- **Recommendation 6.** We recommend that the Welsh Government reconsider the grants it proposes to include in an integrated funding stream, and particularly considers, as part of future development, the relative merits of integrating Supporting People solely with housing and homelessness grants.

This recommendation relates to an alternative proposal that Cymorth has been advocating since the plan to merge the ten grant streams came to light in October 2017. It would create a new ring-fenced grant which combines the **Supporting People Programme Grant** with the **Homelessness Prevention Grant**, as well as the **funding that will soon be devolved to the Welsh Government for housing costs in short term supported accommodation**. This constructive solution would help the Welsh Government to achieve its aim of reducing the number of grants it manages - but critically, it would also protect the future funding for homelessness and housing-related support services in a ring-fenced fund.

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Cymorth Cymru Director Katie Dalton said:

“We are extremely pleased that the Public Accounts Committee has recognised the widespread and significant concerns relating to the Welsh Government’s proposal to merge the Supporting People Programme with a series of non-housing grants.

“The housing sector is deeply committed to supporting the most vulnerable and marginalised people to avoid homelessness and live independently. However, we are terrified of the potential impact on our ability to do so if the ring-fence is removed from this vital funding. We only have to look at the evidence from England to see the risks, with the Auditor General finding average cuts of 45% when the ring-fence was removed from Supporting People funding there.

“Over the past few months we have consistently called for an alternative solution, which helps the Welsh Government to reduce the number of grants it manages - but retains a ring-fence around programmes that are rooted in housing. We are delighted that the Committee has seen merit in our proposal and we urge Ministers and Assembly Members of all parties to show their support for this alternative.”

- ENDS -

Availability for interviews:

- Katie Dalton is available for radio interviews on 18 May. Please contact her on 07807 137505 or katiedalton@cymorthcymru.org.uk to arrange interviews.
- If you would like more information or to arrange television interviews then please contact Cymorth Cymru Policy and External Affairs Manager Oliver Townsend on 02920 553687 or 07734 408275.

About Cymorth: Cymorth Cymru is the representative body for homelessness and housing-related support services in Wales, influencing the development and implementation of policy that affects our members and the people they support. Cymorth has around 100 members across Wales, made up of third sector organisations, housing associations and local authorities. We work in partnership with members and other stakeholders to prevent and reduce homelessness and improve the quality of life for people who are marginalised or at risk of housing crisis across Wales.

Cymorth Cymru’s written evidence to the Public Accounts Committee inquiry can be found [here](#).

About the Supporting People Programme: The Supporting People programme provides housing-related support to prevent homelessness and help vulnerable people to live as independently as possible. The Programme is funded by the Welsh Government, commissioned by local authorities and delivered by a range of charities and housing organisations across Wales. Services include supported accommodation schemes and tenancy support to people in their own homes. The Programme supports approximately 60,000 each year, including vulnerable young people and care leavers, older people, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, people fleeing domestic abuse, people with mental health problems, people with learning disabilities and people with substance misuse problems.

The proposed Early Intervention: Prevention and Support Grant: This has been proposed for 2019/20 and includes Supporting People, Flying Start, Families First, Communities First Legacy Fund, Communities for Work Plus, Childcare and Play, St David’s Day Fund, Promoting Positive Engagement for Young People, Homelessness Prevention Grant and Rent Smart Wales Enforcement. More information on the flexible funding Pathfinders and EIPS grant can be found [here](#).