Dyfed Powys Homelessness Strategy

Purpose of this document

This document gives a brief overarching direction in relation to how each of the 4 authorities in the region will tackle and prevent homelessness over the coming years.

For greater detail each local authority has completed a review of their current services and from these, and from drawing on this strategy, the have all completed individual action plans.

This document offers the broad direction and, as could be expected, there will be different priorities in each of the 4 councils.

Key principles / direction of travel

*Diagram taken from the 'Homeless Hub', Canada http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention

The diagram illustrates how international thinking is progressing in relation to effectively tackling homelessness.

The diagram at the top indicates how, traditionally, services and resources have been focussed. The majority are centred on providing the 'emergency response', i.e. are triggered when a household is homeless. To make services more effective and

prevent people falling into crisis we should be thinking differently and focussing resources differently.

As our action plans develop and we implement our strategies, we want to model services to get to households early. We have resources offering support in many community settings, our objective is to harness this support so that it is delivered early; whether through Supporting People funding, financial advice funding, or housing advice funding, etc.; so that people can access help before they fall into crisis and approach the local authority.

Therefore, the purpose of this strategy is to outline our desire to shift the current approach, by drawing resources and demand from the 'emergency response', (and triggering our homelessness duties); to the following two key areas;

- community-based support to prevent homelessness before it becomes a crisis
- assertive support and accommodation options for those with complex needs who are creating more & more demands on a variety of services

By adopting such an approach this strategy argues, that not only will it reflect the direction advocated by a great of international research, but also complement the national and local strategic direction, not only in relation to housing / homelessness; but also, other related service areas such as Health, Social Services and Criminal Justice.

National Strategic Context

The Welsh Government's 'Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' is the driving force of national policy. It "requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change". To facilitate these aims each authority has now established a 'Public Service Board' bringing all key partners to oversee progress and plan action.

These boards have each developed a plan and any homelessness strategy must work to complement these plans.

Sitting underneath this Act are two other important pieces of recent Welsh Government legislation

- Housing (Wales) Act 2014

This is particularly relevant to this strategy. It introduced new duties for local authorities and its partners; it puts the prevention of homelessness at the very heart of the homelessness agenda and it brought the use of the private rented sector into far more prevalent position in relation to discharging homelessness duties.

However, despite this focus on prevention, a recent Welsh Audit Office report still highlighted how "local authorities continue to focus on managing people in crisis rather than stop it from happening".

This is perhaps an indication of how new legal duties are not enough. If we are to truly change cultures in relation to preventing homelessness, we need to work across departments and agencies.

- Social Services & Well Being (Wales) Act 2015

The other key piece of legislation in relation to homelessness and how we prevent it is the 'Social Services & Well Being (Wales) Act 2015. Once again, the emphasis in this legislation is not to focus resources on 'crisis', but to deliver and commission services which prevent more costly care options.

This offers an excellent opportunity in relation to preventing homelessness. Agencies commissioned by Housing, Social Services and Health should all be working to the same aim; so how do we work in partnership to achieve it?

Local Strategic Context

Firstly, it is worth stressing the importance the Welsh language plays in all four local authority areas. Dyfed / Powys continues to be one of the strongholds of the Welsh language with bilingual communities at the foundation of its culture and everyday life. Communities are continuing to change due to the lack of affordable housing and employment, and this change is having a direct impact on the Welsh language and culture.

To sustain the culture and enhance the use of the Welsh language in all aspects of everyday life in Dyfed /Powys one of the principle aims of this Strategy is to address the lack of opportunities for local people to access both suitable housing and employment due to both availability and / or affordability.

The strategy aims to ensure sufficient opportunities for local people to access affordable or social housing and to enable them to remain within the community of their choice. This is considered in more detail in each individual action plan.

In more general terms, following the implementation of Local Service Boards, in line with the 'Future Generations' agenda, each of the four Dyfed Powys authorities are working to implement over-arching Corporate Plans. These are;

- 'The Carmarthenshire We Want'
- 'Ceredigion for All'
- 'Well Being Plan for Pembrokeshire'
- 'Powys – Vision 2025'

All these plans aim to help people at 'the right time, in the right place' and to empower local communities. All are focussing on developing preventative services to ease the pressure on more costly options. The direction discussed in relation to how we approach homelessness in the first section of this strategy will complement and help meet the aims of all 4 corporate plans.

What's happening to homelessness in the region?

If we are to plan how to take services forward, we must first take stock. To this end, each of the authorities have undertaken reviews of how homelessness services are currently delivered and how they are working in partnership with all key stakeholders.

Clearly, there are differences in each area; but it is possible to identify some key themes.

- **Since the introduction of the recent Housing Act the number of households being found homeless has increased**

Local Authority	Number of households found homeless (under s73) 2015-16	Number of households found homeless (under s73) 2017-18	% increase
Carmarthenshire	573	786	37%
Ceredigion	171	192	12%
Pembrokeshire	342	345	1%
Powys	174	231	33%
Total	**1260**	**1554**	**23%**

- **This has led to increasing pressure on Housing Options / 'the emergency response'**

In discussions with managers and staff responsible for fulfilling each authority's homelessness duties; the evidence suggests the increase in numbers is having an impact.

Housing Options Teams are carefully managing their resources to meet increased demands. However, there is concern if demand continues to rise there less time dedicated to each case and the options available to assist and help the household resolve their housing issue are becoming increasingly difficult to access.

In effect, authorities face a choice. Either they will need to increase staff numbers to help support the larger numbers of households approaching the statutory service; or they can explore ways to help 'turn off' this demand.

- **People are approaching Council homelessness services with ever more complex needs**

The other key piece of feedback from those delivering the 'emergency response' and discharging the authority's homelessness duties, was the increase in the complexity of the issues being faced by some households who are approaching them. The reasons for this need to be explored in more depth, but the evidence suggests that those with a variety of complex mental ill health, substance misuse and offending

issues are unable to sustain their housing and are returning regularly for help and assistance.

Those working in the service often feel 'out of their depth' in tackling these issues and the households create significant demands on their already stretched time.

- **Less affordable options for single people, (especially those under 35)**

To add more difficulties to the two factors discussed above, the options for single people, which are both affordable and sustainable are becoming increasingly difficult to access. The table below indicates the proportion of single people on each Council's current housing register.

Local Authority	% of households with one bed housing need on housing register
Carmarthenshire	40%
Ceredigion	49%
Pembrokeshire	61%
Powys	44%

As the table illustrates, the demand for single person accommodation would appear high. The proportion of households on waiting list with a need for one bedroomed accommodation far exceeds the proportion of one bed properties available within the social housing stock. (This becomes even more pronounced when you omit one bed accommodation designated for older people).

The private rented sector was highlighted as a key partner in meeting these needs, but the reviews indicate an ever-greater reluctance for landlords to get engaged in this agenda.

Landlords are reportedly leaving the market, not only because of increased regulation, (such as 'Rent Smart Wales'); but also, welfare reform which is being perceived as an increasing risk when letting properties and will be discussed below.

- **Challenges of the introduction of Universal Credit**

Universal Credit is a benefit being introduced across the UK to replace 6 existing means tested benefits. It is already in place in all 4 authorities for claimants who have less complex claims but will be going live for all new claimants, and anyone who experiences a change of circumstance, imminently across the 4 LA areas.

All reviews have flagged the concerns of agencies, both working in housing and beyond, in relation to how this new approach will impact upon vulnerable people and the impact it will have on them being able to pay their rent and vis a vis retain their housing.

- **All services are facing on-going financial challenges**

In recent years local authority services across the region have faced the challenge of making efficiency savings, not just in relation to homelessness and housing, it has been a challenge facing all public services

There is no indication of this environment changing imminently. We are not able to provide extra services, we are in a position where we must think more carefully about how we spend existing / decreasing funds.

Our Key Priorities - What are we going to do?

To reflect national and local objectives and tackle issues indicated within reviews, we will;

- **Continue to evolve and harness community-based services to assist in the prevention of homelessness**

We need to manage the increased numbers of households triggering homelessness duties. Therefore, we need to find a way of working to get to people earlier and 'turn off' this demand.

There are community services currently aiming to do this. For example, the Regional Supporting People Plan is advocating the development of locality-based support services across the region and this is in the process of being adopted. These services will play a key role.

However, it is not just these services. Health services are moving into the community, Social Services are recognising the importance of getting to people early, and developments like 'Local Area Coordination' & 'Community Connectors' are vital to tap into. Community led organisations, such as food banks, are in a position where they can spot vulnerable people early and draw in the support they need.

We will also work closely with social housing providers, both Council and Housing Associations. Their housing officers are the 'eyes and ears' on the estates they work; and their local intelligence will be harnessed to ensure support can be delivered early to any household facing housing issues.

- **By utilising intelligence, explore how we can focus support to households in those localities which are producing the highest proportion of homelessness cases in order to prevent it**

From research undertaken as part of the review in Carmarthenshire, it was established that those triggering homelessness duties are often living in certain areas. There are 58 Council Wards in the authority; over 50% of households found homeless / at threat of homelessness came from just 10 of these wards.

If we are to focus scant resources, we need to develop this intelligence across the region. We will identify the wards which are experiencing most homelessness, and then model our early intervention services, so they are targeting these wards / households and preventing homelessness.

- **Utilise IT systems and technology to prevent homelessness by ensuring systems are in place which flag up issues early to trigger help and advice as early as possible**

IT can have an important role to play in identifying issues early. Ceredigion already has a system in place which allows households and the agencies they are working with to upload their housing needs on line. This then allows a response early and can 'turn off' demands on the frontline service.

A similar system is now being commissioned by Carmarthenshire and Powys. When establishing these systems, it is essential they are developed in full partnership with partner agencies working in communities and that they can trigger responses for support before any statutory duty.

- **In partnership with key agencies explore how a multi-agency case management approach can evolve to meet the needs of households who revolve around the homeless system and place demands on a variety of services**

The reviews found that all authorities are struggling to meet the needs of those with the most complex needs. Theses might not constitute large numbers of households, but the demands they create are significant; not just on housing services but Health, Social Services, criminal justice and substance misuse services.

Other local authority areas in Wales are trying to meet the needs of this group by establishing partnerships to 'case manage' the support these households receive. For example, Neath Port Talbot has established a 'Street Vulnerable Multi Agency Risk Assessment Committee', chaired by South Wales Police and involving a variety of agencies.

This type of partnership approach, which doesn't simply end once the household is housed, will be explored to identify if it can help reduce demands on homelessness services and improve the outcomes for those households who often 'revolve' through the homelessness system.

- **In partnership with local stakeholders and other statutory services, each local authority to explore whether a 'Housing First' approach can be developed to support those with the most complex needs**

In partnership with the multi-agency approach described above, each authority will also explore taking a 'Housing First' approach to meeting the needs of the households with the most complex needs.

What is Housing First?

"'Housing First' is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centres on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional support and services as needed" -WG 2018

For more details the Welsh Government have published Housing First – National Principles & Guidance - https://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/180206-housing-first-en.pdf

The approach is being advocated by both UK and Welsh Governments and international evidence suggests it leads to far more positive outcomes for these households in relation to the sustainability of their accommodation.

By taking this approach, authorities will work over and above their duties. Any service will ignore issues like' priority need' or 'intentionality'; the housing provided will sit outside the normal allocations process and be made available on a permanent basis.

Each authority will explore with partners, such as housing providers, Health and Social Services; if there is an appetite to develop this type of service and, if so, plan and commission a service to reflect local needs.

- **Each authority to explore with their Housing Association and private landlord partners how to develop affordable and sustainable housing options for single people**

As discussed, it is not just those with the most complex issues who are placing pressures on the emergency response. Each authority is facing pressure securing housing options for single people.

Therefore, as part of this strategy, we will develop plans with our partners to increase affordable and sustainable housing solutions for single people.

- **Each authority to develop close partnership working with DWP/Job Centre+ to mitigate any impact the introduction of Universal Credit may have on household's ability to retain their tenancies**

The implementation of this new benefit system has been flagged up as a challenge. Work is on-going in all four authorities to prepare for this, but it needs to be key objective of this strategy to ensure we are working in close partnership with DWP and Job Centre+ colleagues so that the required help and support is available for all households making the transition to the new benefit.

Our Strategy in Summary
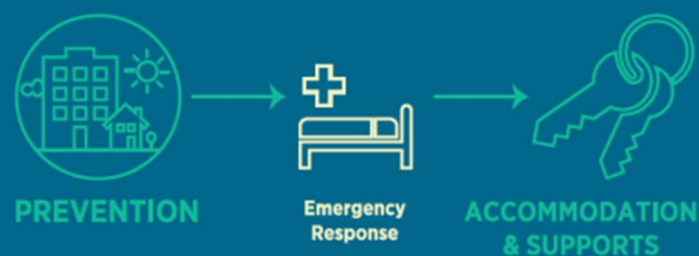
Returning to the diagram, each of our objectives looks to explore how we can refocus services, so they are working to either prevent households becoming homeless or offer the right support and accommodation options to avoid them becoming homeless again.

As each action plan evolves during the period of the strategy greater details on how we achieve this will become apparent and it is important that learning is shared across the region.