



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board: update Autumn 2024

An update on the themes discussed by the board over the past year and the work of the task and finish groups.

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Introduction

As social housing waiting lists grow and private rents rise, more than 11,000 people were living in temporary accommodation^[1] this summer. Furthermore, new statistics show that councils assessed 13,539 households as homeless and owed a duty to help secure accommodation - the highest figure since the Housing Act Wales was introduced.^[2] In such difficult times, it is critical that we press ahead with the Welsh Government's national plan to end homelessness.

For those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, the impact is traumatic and life changing. Without a stable home, our mental wellbeing and physical health can spiral. It can be hard to find a job, nurture relationships and move forwards in life. We must continue with the national commitment to a "no one left out" approach and to reform homelessness legislation, so that everyone can access the support they need.

The increase in homelessness is also having a significant impact for our frontline workers. Across Wales we are privileged to have dedicated frontline workers who want to work in housing because they have a drive to help people. While supporting people to build a life beyond homelessness is fulfilling, these jobs – especially in the context of exceptionally high caseloads – can be emotionally challenging. We must move forward with supporting a resilient and valued workforce.

There are wider impacts for public services too. For example, lengthy periods of homelessness can lead to more complex health needs, ultimately increasing the demand upon health services.^[3] Furthermore, the high numbers of people staying for long periods in temporary accommodation results in a growing bill for local authorities.^[4] We must continue with commitments to build more social homes and move to a housing-led system where people can swiftly move into settled homes. And we must build on work to prevent homelessness in the first place.

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Moving forward and progressing the multiple commitments across the Welsh Government's Ending Homelessness Action Plan is essential. The Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board (EHNAB) remains committed to its role in advising the Welsh Government along this journey.

Following on from our annual report in July last year, ^[5] EHNAB has continued to work closely across a number of the core areas identified within this report. The Board seeks to provide helpful and meaningful insights as well as practical solutions to assist the Welsh Government in continuing to make progress in these crucial areas.

This briefing provides an interim update for the newly appointed Cabinet Secretary in Autumn 2024. It summarises the emerging themes discussed by the board over the past year as well as the key areas of ongoing work across the Board's task and finish groups. The Board intends to publish a further report in the new year with detailed recommendations as this work progresses.

Topical matters discussed by EHNAB

Housing Supply

As identified in our report last year, EHNAB believes making progress on housing supply is critical to the wider aim of ending homelessness in Wales. Increasing affordable housing supply is at the foundation of the shift towards a rapid rehousing approach which enables people to move into a suitable home as soon as possible.

Over the past year, the Board has welcomed quarterly updates from Welsh Government on efforts to meet the Welsh Government commitment to 20,000 additional homes for rent in the social sector this Senedd term. The Board

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recognises that while the Welsh Government has been working hard on achieving this target and addressing a multitude of barriers, as highlighted in the recently published Audit Wales **Affordable Housing** report, there remains a critical need to invest heavily and continue to drive the momentum forward if this commitment is to be realised in 2026. Pressing ahead with this agenda is crucial and the Board would urge the newly appointed Cabinet to ensure this is a key area of focus.

In addition, EHNAB is clear that we must seek to ensure plans to increase homes for social rent are appropriately informed by the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The new project developed as part of the Rapid Rehousing Task and Finish Group seeks to provide valuable insights in this regard (see below for more detail).

Members of the Board were also especially interested in the introduction of the new approach to undertaking Local Housing Market Assessments (LHMA), which seeks to capture increased granularity of housing need data at a local authority level. EHNAB is keen to hear more information about the submissions the Welsh Government has received from Local Authorities in the coming months.

In addition, EHNAB is aware that the Local Government and Housing Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into the supply of social housing. It will be important to learn from these findings.

The White paper on Ending Homelessness

The Board welcomed the publication of the Welsh Government's White Paper on Ending Homelessness on World Homeless Day last October. As is identified in the Ending Homelessness Action Plan, legislative reform is a key part of the wider picture in ending homelessness across our country. EHNAB has welcomed the request for the task and finish groups, including the Health and

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Homelessness group, to assist in ad-hoc advice as proposals develop further.

The Board believes it is imperative that the newly formed Cabinet drives forward with commitments to reform homelessness legislation this Senedd term.

Housing Support Grant (HSG)

Throughout the year, the importance of investing in our homelessness services has been a consistent theme across the Board's discussions– in particular, the Housing Support Grant (HSG), which funds many homelessness support services across the country.

While the Board appreciates the significant financial pressure under which the Welsh Government was setting the last budget, the Board was concerned when draft budgets indicated that the HSG was set to remain static.

EHNAB Members acknowledged the implications this would have for service delivery across Wales – especially within the context of rising numbers of homelessness presentations, as well as increasingly complex caseloads. In particular, the Board noted with concern the research from Cymorth Cymru and Community Housing Cymru which indicated that 77% of services considered themselves likely to reduce their services and 40% to hand back contracts.^[6] Cymorth Cymru, Community Housing Cymru and members of the Workforce Task and Finish Group also reported concerns that frontline workers are on salaries below the minimum and Real Living Wage and that a static HSG budget made it extremely difficult for providers to increase pay and retain skilled staff.

The Board was pleased that the then Cabinet Secretary listened to concerns raised by the housing sector on this matter and that the Welsh Government was able to uplift the Homelessness Prevention Budget within its finalised budget in February, and consequently uplift the HSG. In line with calls from Cymorth

Cymru and Community Housing Cymru, the Cabinet Secretary encouraged this uplift to be utilised on achieving the Real Living Wage for staff.

As we approach the next draft budget, which will undoubtedly present continued financial challenges, Board members have expressed the need to protect the gains made in the last budgetary settlement and continue to invest in HSG and the workforce.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

The Board has long raised concerns around levels of investment in LHA and was pleased to see the commitment to increase LHA in the UK Government's Autumn budget last year. While this investment is welcome, Board members are keen to see a longer-term commitment to invest in housing benefit so that renting a home can be genuinely more affordable. This is a particular issue in Wales, where research showed only 2% of properties were advertised within LHA rates in 2022/23.^[7]

The Board is pleased that the Welsh Government has previously made representations to the UK Government to this end. We hope that the Welsh Government will continue to do so now that a new UK Government is in position and as we approach the next budget in October, emphasising that this is a core area where our governments can collaborate to achieve a change to benefit people on the brink of homelessness in England and Wales.

Criminal Justice Bill

Over the past year, members of the Board expressed considerable concern around measures within the former UK Government's proposed Criminal Justice Bill. These measures would have introduced police powers in England and

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Wales to fine or imprison people for sleeping rough or begging. The Board considered that, if introduced, this Bill would drive a culture of mistrust between people facing street homelessness and authorities. EHNAB felt that the proposals threatened to undermine the positive direction of travel towards a trauma-informed approach to homelessness in Wales.

For these reasons, the Board was pleased to see the Welsh Government opposing these measures within its Legislative Consent Memorandum.

While the Criminal Justice Bill was dropped after the General Election was called, the Board has noted that the Vagrancy Act of 1824 remains in place, despite cross party support (and support in the Senedd) for scrapping the act. This act still enables people to be criminalised for being homeless. **EHNAB hopes that the Welsh Government will continue to support a repeal of the Vagrancy Act.**

Task and Finish Groups

The work of the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board is informed by the work of a series of dedicated task and finish groups. Each of these groups focus on exploring core recommendations within the previous EHNAB annual report, seeking to provide the Welsh Government with further advice in these areas.

EHNAB is extremely grateful to the chairs and members of these task and finish groups. We anticipate that the groups will be in a position to provide more detailed recommendations in the coming months.

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Ending Homelessness National Outcomes Framework Task and Finish Group

Following the Board's last annual report, the consultation on the [Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework](#) (EHOF) came to a close and the framework was subsequently published January 2024. As such, the task and finish group associated with this work also came to an end earlier this year.

The Board is grateful to the group for establishing this framework, which is a valuable tool in supporting the strategic direction for preventing and ending homelessness in Wales.

The [Ending Homelessness Outcome Framework: Baseline report](#) was published July 2024. This is the first 'baseline' report published against the new Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework. This report is intended to be read in conjunction with the [Ending Homelessness Action Plan](#), last updated August 2023.

It is recognised that there will be ongoing work in achieving the full dataset required for the framework. The Welsh Government has established a new internal Homelessness Data Board with colleagues in Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services to drive forward the longer-term strategic aims for homelessness statistics and deliver improvements to homelessness data in Wales.

It is also noted that the framework may need to adapt as legislative change is brought forward.

However, in the meantime, the Board is pleased that the framework is being utilised and welcomed the first annual baseline report.

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Workforce Task and Finish Group

The workforce task and finish group has continued to press ahead in exploring mechanisms which would support the Welsh Government's commitment to "develop a resilient and valued workforce recognised for their expertise."

Over the past year, the group has built upon its previous report, which looked at the need to develop the emotional support available to frontline workers, who are often working in high pressure environments. Following on from this, the group has initiated discussions with Welsh Government to pilot access for frontline workers in homelessness to Canopi – an emotional support service used by NHS and Social Care staff in Wales.

The group has also completed a new best practice guide, which seeks to assist services across the sector in recruiting staff.

In addition, the group has begun work across a series of other workstreams, including:

- Consideration of salaries. The group is currently analysing data on support worker pay, using survey returns from 3,000 of the circa 3,500 workers in Wales.
- Developing a proposed skills and qualifications pathway for frontline staff.
- Developing a new set of best practice commissioning guidance focusing on workforce terms and conditions. The group intend for this guidance to include an expectation that providers will be paying at least the Real Living Wage over an agreed time frame; longer term contracts to provide greater job security; as well as a commitment to provide time and resource for staff training, development, and reflective practice.

The task and finish group is expected to report back to the Board on each of these areas later this year.

In the meantime, the group has also been considering how each of these workstreams connect under a broader vision for the workforce, similar to the Fair Work framework for social care workers. The group is in the process of developing this vision, which it anticipates will include the need for fair reward and recognition, a supportive working environment as well as job security and progression. The group will also consider how this vision can encompass outcomes for people facing homelessness as well as reflect the transition to a Rapid Rehousing approach.

The group proposes that, similar to the model for social care, a Homelessness Fair Work Forum may be established to implement and deliver a vision for the frontline workforce, supported by the work of the task and finish group.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

The Welsh Government's Ending Homelessness National Action Plan and Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan both highlight the importance of ensuring homelessness solutions are inclusive of ethnic minority groups. To help support this, the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion group has focused for the past year on race and ethnicity.

The group met with the chairs of the task and finish groups on workforce and rapid rehousing and has made recommendations to help secure a race and ethnic minority lens to these workstreams. The chairs of the groups have welcomed these recommendations and will embed them within their ongoing work.

The group also provided a series of **recommendations** for consideration across the Welsh Government's ongoing work. In particular, the group identified a need

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for clearer data on race, ethnic minority groups and homelessness. The group stressed the need to address this data gap to improve understanding of the scale and particular barriers these groups face in accessing a stable and secure home, as well as to monitor outcomes for Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities. It identified the opportunities to develop data in this area to support the implementation of proposed legislative reforms and the further development of the Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework.

The EDI group highlighted the particular risk of destitution among those who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) due to their status and ability to access support. The group felt that it is especially important to address the lack of available data on people experiencing homelessness who have NRPF and to build a more detailed picture of understanding of this issue in Wales.

The EDI group presented a [paper](#) to the Board calling for research to be commissioned to establish how data gaps on homelessness and race, ethnicity and NRPF can be addressed and consistently collated in the future. Welsh Government officials are considering the paper and whether there are other means or workstreams that could help to address this issue. There are also considerations for the Welsh Government's wider work on developing homelessness data.

Rapid Rehousing

The task and finish group on rapid rehousing has recently reset its workplan. With the support of the Board, it has identified two key issues that are fundamental in progressing towards the rapid rehousing approach and established two new working groups to explore these areas.

The first working group recognises the crucial importance of planning the right homes in the right places. This working group will consider how effectively information on the local needs of people experiencing homelessness aligns with

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supply. The working group will conduct deep dives with three local authorities – Conwy, Cardiff, and Rhondda Cynon Taf - to carefully consider data across planning systems and structures, including RRTPs and LHMA. Through this work, the group will identify good practice as well as areas where levers and systems might be improved to create a greater connect between the needs of people experiencing homelessness and supply planning. The working group aims to present practical recommendations to assist both the Welsh Government and local authorities across Wales in ensuring plans to develop housing supply are aligned with homelessness demands.

The second working group acknowledges that, as stated in the board's previous report, a move towards rapid rehousing requires wide-ranging stakeholder support. It is critical that this support stretches beyond housing services and spans across local government departments, as well as other key stakeholders. This group will focus on increasing awareness of rapid rehousing and the benefits that this approach delivers both for people who are experiencing homelessness, as well as for our public services. Specifically, the working group will look to develop a communications plan to assist with this. The Board is also keen that the working group delivers a national summit on rapid rehousing, drawing together key partners from across the country and driving forward momentum for this approach. **We would ask that the Welsh Government looks to formally support a national summit.**

Health and Homelessness

The health and homelessness task and finish group has also undergone a review of its workplan alongside the addition of new members.

The group consists of professionals from across each of the health boards, as well as from Public Health Wales, HMPPS, the Royal College of GPs, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Pathway (UK Homelessness and Inclusion Health Charity).

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The workplan for the group will now cover three core areas:

- The role of health in homelessness prevention
- Improved access to primary care
- Ensuring that no one is knowingly discharged from hospital into homelessness.

Across each of these areas, the group will provide advice to the Welsh Government on the health aspects of the White Paper. This includes considering a trial within emergency units and hospital wards of the duty to refer people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. It will also include consideration of building upon existing guidance around preventing discharge from hospitals into homelessness.

In addition, the group will harness learning from ongoing projects across Wales to drive forward the health inclusion agenda. In particular, the group will look to develop systems, processes, and tools to support Primary Care clusters in planning their approach to health inclusion. It will also explore ways to strengthen the trauma-informed approach to health care provision for people within the probation service and people leaving prison.

Next Steps

The Board seeks the support and endorsement of the Cabinet Secretary for the workstreams as outlined above. We look forward to providing more detailed recommendations in the coming months.

In the new year, the Board will review its workplan to ensure it reflects the most important priorities, as well as the current context of the Ending Homelessness National Action Plan.

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[1] See [Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping: June 2024 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#).

[2] See <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2024/9/1/1726473445/homelessness-april-2023-march-2024.pdf>

[3] For example, see <https://phw.nhs.wales/publications/publications1/health-of-individuals-with-lived-experience-of-homelessness-in-wales-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-infographic/>

[4] For example, a report by Audit Wales reported that costs for Temporary Accommodation in Flintshire was increasing by more than 300%, see *Audit Wales (2023) Homeless Services – Flintshire County Council*. However, we understand that there are cost issues across the country.

[5] See [Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board: Annual Report to Welsh Ministers 202-23 \(gov.wales\)](#).

[6] See [HM-report-WG-Budget-24-25-ENG.pdf \(cymorthcymru.org.uk\)](#)

[7] See [Charity calls for an end to housing benefit freeze this winter as shocking new statistics unveiled | Crisis | Together we will end homelessness](#). See also research from the Bevan Foundation, which showed just 32 private rental properties across Wales in February 2023 were within LHA rates <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/resources/housing-winter-2023/>.

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