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Modelling the need for advice on social welfare

Executive summary

1. Research aims and methodology

1.1 This paper reports on research into the need for social welfare advice within Welsh local authorities. The objectives of the study were to:

- a) Estimate quantitatively the need for advice in the six social welfare categories below for each of the 22 local authority areas.

The social welfare categories are:

- i. Welfare Benefits
- ii. Debt
- iii. Consumer and Finance (including financial guidance)
- iv. Housing and Neighbour
- v. Employment
- vi. Discrimination

- b) Disaggregate estimates at the local authority level according to three forms of advice:

- i. information level (on policies, rights and practices)
- ii. general help (on clients' specific circumstances, which may include some casework)
- iii. specialist help by category (where advice is at a level where detailed knowledge of an area of law is required)

- c) Further disaggregate estimates of generalist and specialist help, if feasible, to estimate the balance of need for:

- i. preventative advice
- ii. reactive advice

1.2 This has been achieved through model-based estimation of the prevalence of different types of justiciable problems. The models are fitted to data sourced from the Civil and Social Justice Survey (University College London. Faculty of Laws 2015), which include prompted responses (using showcards) to questions on whether or not different types of justiciable problems have been experienced by survey respondents. These questions are used to derive the dependent variables for the models. The independent variables are derived from demographic data generated from the

Civil and Social Justice Panel Survey, with some additional data stemming from Office of National Statistics (ONS) sources. The choice of independent variable is informed by past studies, their predictive power, and the statistical significance of relationships after testing. The final models are generalised linear regression models at the local authority level, but include individual risk factors resulting from a prior round of logistic modelling at the individual level. An analysis of predicted and observed values based on these 2010 data was undertaken to indicate the ability of the models to accurately predict the prevalence of justiciable problems.

- 1.3 The Civil and Social Justice Survey does not provide an adequate sample size throughout Wales, nor is it recent or expected to be frequent enough, to provide ongoing credible estimates for the current prevalence of justiciable problems. Therefore, the regression coefficients obtained from the modelling process are applied to a second dataset in order to make more timely estimates for every Welsh local authority. This second dataset is primarily composed of variables from the more recent and frequent National Survey for Wales (Welsh Government 2015c) and supplemented by freely accessible ONS data. This second dataset does not itself include any information on justiciable problems but, by design, includes all of the independent variables used in the regression models. This allows for prevalence estimates (i.e. the rate of justiciable problems in the population) to be calculated for each local authority in Wales by applying¹ the coefficients generated during the modelling process to the variables in the second dataset.
- 1.4 The prevalence estimates of justiciable problems are then applied to population estimates for each local authority to provide estimates of the total number of different problems in each area. Some small, downward adjustments are also applied to account for the possibility of double counting between the categories of justiciable problems (see main report). Finally, the estimated numbers of justiciable problems in each category are disaggregated by the type of advice which could be applicable to these problems. In doing so, estimates are made of the amount of specialist and preventative advice required to address the justiciable problems fully.

2. Key findings

Estimated prevalence of justiciable problems

- 2.1 The tables below show the estimated prevalence of five types of justiciable problems for each local authority in Wales. 'Prevalence' refers to the number of problems expected to occur for every 100 residents (aged 16 years or over) within an 18-month period. For example, a randomly selected 100 residents (aged 16 years or over) from the Isle of Anglesey would be expected to suffer seven justiciable problems with benefits within an 18-month period.
- 2.2 This does not necessarily mean that seven per cent of the residents of Anglesey suffer from justiciable problems with benefits, as some residents may experience multiple benefit problems. Similarly, some of the residents who experience benefit problems may be the same residents who experience other types of problems, such as employment or debt problems. The table therefore corresponds to the prevalence of problems amongst local populations, not the percentage of residents who experience them.

¹ Using the regression formulae

Table 2.1: Estimated prevalence of justiciable problems per 100 people within an 18-month period, by local authority

Area	Benefits	Employment	Housing and Neighbour	Debt	Consumer and Finance
Isle of Anglesey	7.19	7.23	13.10	8.80	2.33
Gwynedd	7.77	7.62	22.55	10.15	2.03
Conwy	7.29	6.50	16.30	9.34	2.11
Denbighshire	6.83	6.60	11.90	8.63	2.00
Flintshire	7.15	7.31	17.40	11.62	1.99
Wrexham	8.10	7.15	22.67	14.94	2.30
Powys	5.83	5.61	14.72	9.02	1.47
Ceredigion	5.22	5.12	18.53	8.17	1.41
Pembrokeshire	6.26	5.53	13.15	10.95	1.84
Carmarthenshire	6.35	6.04	12.66	10.29	2.08
Swansea	8.09	6.34	22.47	9.31	1.97
Neath Port Talbot	7.44	6.91	14.85	11.19	2.15
Bridgend	8.54	7.15	17.19	13.01	2.30
Vale of Glamorgan	6.81	7.04	13.18	7.63	1.26
Cardiff	6.80	6.37	19.08	7.14	1.40
Rhondda Cynon Taf	8.42	6.87	14.74	11.22	1.65
Merthyr Tydfil	8.55	6.12	12.21	12.08	2.24
Caerphilly	8.35	6.14	16.03	12.05	2.04
Blaenau Gwent	7.67	6.55	18.91	12.85	2.03
Torfaen	8.97	7.36	18.28	14.69	2.82
Monmouthshire	5.84	6.06	20.45	10.96	1.56
Newport	8.00	7.50	18.29	10.05	1.70

Colour gradients apply within each column. Red signifies a relatively high prevalence rate of a particular type of justiciable problem, whilst green signifies a relatively low rate². These figures are estimates and may therefore be subject to inaccuracies. Complex local circumstances can have a profound effect on justiciable problems and model-based estimates may be more accurate for some areas than for others

Estimated number of justiciable problems

2.3 The table below shows the estimated number of justiciable problems in the five categories for each local authority. This is calculated by applying the prevalence rates to the estimated number of residents aged 16 years or over in each local authority (with some slight weighting, see main report). The table shows, as an example, that 12,724 employment problems would be expected to arise in Swansea during an 18-month period.

² Colour scales produced through the Conditional Formatting tool on Microsoft Excel where green signifies a low value and red signifies a high value.

2.4 The figures relate to an 18-month timeframe. A recent survey finds that six out of 10 respondents (61 per cent) report that their problem had been concluded by the time they were interviewed at the end of the 18-month period (Franklyn, F., Budd, T., Verrill, R. and Willoughby, M. 2017). It can therefore be estimated that approximately four out of 10 (39 per cent) of the problems indicated in the table above are ongoing at any particular point in time.

Table 2.2: Estimated number of justiciable problems within an 18-month period, by local authority

Area	Benefits	Employment	Housing and Neighbour	Debt	Consumer and Finance
Isle of Anglesey	3998	4193	7421	4860	1345
Gwynedd	7599	7772	22465	9858	2061
Conwy	6801	6325	15490	8653	2043
Denbighshire	5082	5122	9019	6377	1545
Flintshire	8617	9189	21362	13908	2490
Wrexham	8558	7879	24400	15677	2523
Powys	6210	6233	15973	9542	1625
Ceredigion	3183	3256	11510	4948	893
Pembrokeshire	6128	5646	13113	10646	1870
Carmarthenshire	9279	9205	18844	14932	3155
Swansea	15568	12724	44047	17792	3935
Neath Port Talbot	8296	8036	16868	12392	2489
Bridgend	9539	8330	19560	14432	2667
Vale of Glamorgan	6791	7322	13388	7556	1304
Cardiff	18992	18556	54285	19805	4059
Rhondda Cynon Taf	15605	13280	27829	20652	3174
Merthyr Tydfil	3951	2950	5748	5544	1075
Caerphilly	11689	8964	22858	16752	2964
Blaenau Gwent	4229	3766	10620	7036	1162
Torfaen	6450	5520	13391	10491	2105
Monmouthshire	4312	4666	15380	8036	1196
Newport	9059	8858	21097	11302	1998

The colour gradients apply within each column. Red signifies a relatively high number of problems (within that category), whilst green signifies a relatively low number. These figures are estimates and may therefore be subject to inaccuracies. Complex local circumstances can have a profound effect on justiciable problems and model-based estimates may be more accurate for some areas than for others.

Estimated total number of justiciable problems

2.5 The following table shows the total number of estimated justiciable problems across all five of the categories used in this study, and the number which are estimated to involve discrimination, too. For example, the chart shows that residents of Blaenau Gwent are expected to experience 26,812 justiciable problems (across the five categories used in this study) during an 18-month period, 1,044 of which may also include discrimination.

2.6 Note that the scope of this study is limited to the five categories of justiciable problems which have been described (see Chapter 2). The figures do not therefore include other problems, such as issues with the school system, with clinical treatments or with legal issues arising from divorce or child protection issues.

2.7 The estimates of the number of discrimination problems are based on the proportion of different types of problems which tend to involve discrimination, too, throughout England and Wales. Therefore, whilst the estimates take into consideration the unique mix of different types of problems within each area, they do not take into account special circumstances which may have an influence on local levels of discrimination. For example, the presence of large migrant populations and the extent to which integration has been successful are also expected to be important factors in the prevalence of some forms of discrimination and may not be adequately reflected in the estimates.

Table 2.3: Estimated number of justiciable problems and the number estimated to involve discrimination within an 18-month period

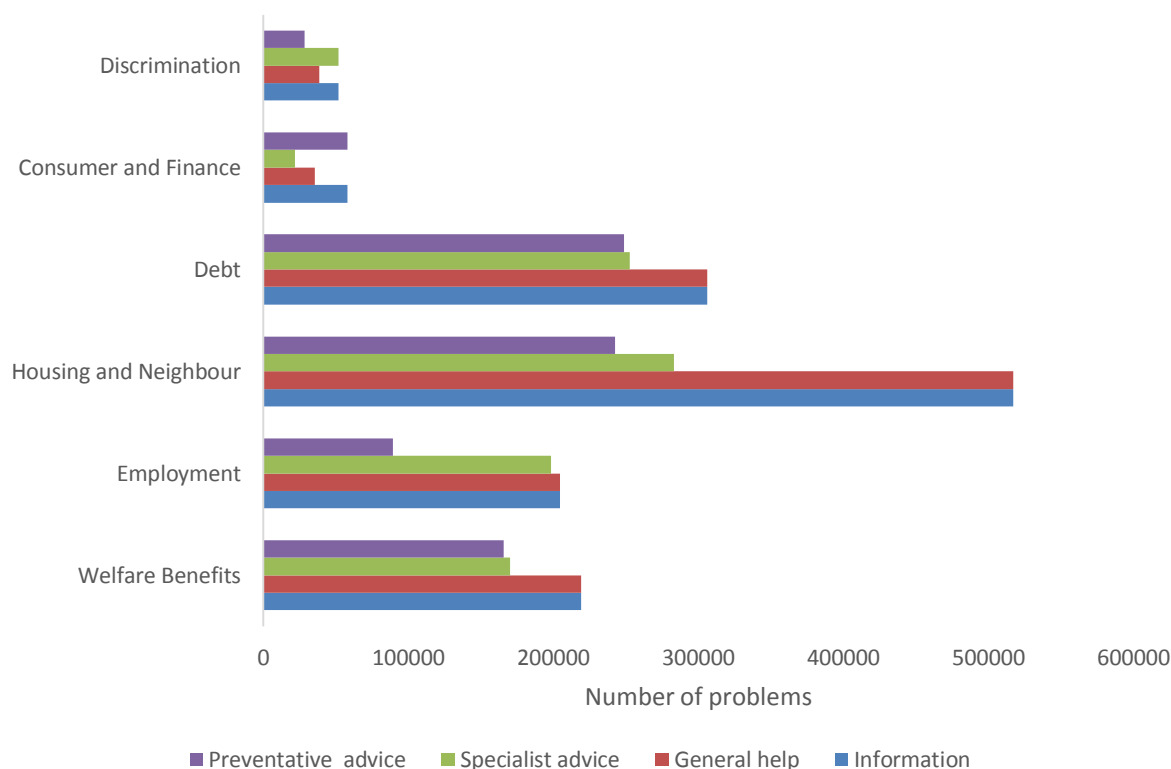
Local authority	Total number of justiciable problems	Number of these problems which may involve discrimination
Isle of Anglesey	21818	923
Gwynedd	49755	1950
Conwy	39313	1579
Denbighshire	27144	1144
Flintshire	55566	2235
Wrexham	59038	2264
Powys	39584	1570
Ceredigion	23790	899
Pembrokeshire	37403	1493
Carmarthenshire	55415	2264
Swansea	94066	3589
Neath Port Talbot	48081	1961
Bridgend	54528	2183
Vale of Glamorgan	36360	1536
Cardiff	115697	4543
Rhondda Cynon Taf	80540	3282
Merthyr Tydfil	19268	787
Caerphilly	63228	2500
Blaenau Gwent	26812	1044
Torfaen	37957	1509
Monmouthshire	33589	1278
Newport	52313	2110

The colour gradients apply within each column. Red signifies a relatively high number of problems, whilst green signifies a relatively low number. These figures are estimates and may therefore be subject to inaccuracies. Complex local circumstances can have a profound effect on justiciable problems and model-based estimates may be more accurate for some areas than for others.

Types of advice

- 2.8 Correctly judging the most appropriate form of advice to administer is best achieved by skilled practitioners on a case-by-case basis, with a good understanding of both the problem and the individual experiencing that problem. The approach taken by this study cannot reach that level of subtlety and the resultant figures should therefore be treated as a guide only. A problem-based approach has been taken in which each of the 104 specific problems has been classified by practitioners according to the type(s) of advice likely to be relevant (information, general help, specialist help and preventative advice). The Information and Advice Quality Framework for Wales (Welsh Government 2016c) states that the existence of this range of types of advice is important in ensuring that people have access to the right support at the right time. The definitions of the types of advice below are based on those given in the IAQF³.
- 2.9 Information provision is appropriate for all justiciable problems, and the chart below therefore shows very high levels of need across all of the categories. However, support needs do differ between the different categories of problems. For example, more preventative advice may be needed for debt problems than for housing and neighbour problems, despite housing and neighbour problems generally being more common. Similarly, specialist advice is disproportionately important for problems which may involve discrimination, whilst preventative advice could play a larger role in combatting consumer and finance problems.

Figure 2.4: Estimated need for different types of advice on justiciable problems in Wales within an 18-month period



³ The IAQF suggests a more complex categorisation of advice types than that used in this study, with five different categories. Nevertheless, the categorisation used in this report approximates that of the IAQF.

- 2.10 As problems can be addressed through more than one form of advice, the figures presented above sum far more than the total number of estimated justiciable problems. The inference of this is not that problems necessarily require each and every form of advice to the levels shown in the table. Although the exact relationship between different forms of advice is unclear, it is expected that investment in information and preventative advice, up to a maximum of that suggested by the table, would, over time, reduce the need for general or specialist advice from the totals shown in the table. However, this report makes no recommendations as to the optimal mix of different types of advice provision.
- 2.11 The estimated need for different type of advice within each local authority can be found in the main report.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 The findings show the distribution of different types of justiciable problems throughout Wales. In absolute terms, the greatest numbers of problems are found in population centres such as Cardiff and Swansea, followed by Rhondda Cynon Taf. However, these are not necessarily the areas with the highest prevalence rates. For example, Wrexham suffers from particularly high rates of housing and neighbour problems and debt problems, whilst Torfaen experiences high rates of problems with benefits, employment, debt, and consumer and finance.
- 3.2 The findings also give an indication of where specialist and preventative advice is most needed. In relative terms, specialist advice is most important for debt, employment and discrimination problems, but in absolute terms, there is also a high demand for specialist advice in housing and neighbour problems, particularly in Cardiff and Swansea. Preventative advice is most important for consumer and finance, debt and welfare benefit problems. In absolute terms, though, there are similar levels of demand for preventative advice for debt problems and housing and neighbour problems. The need for preventative advice on housing and neighbour problems is particularly concentrated within Cardiff and Swansea, whilst the need for preventative advice on debt is more evenly spread throughout additional areas, such as Rhondda Cynon Taf, Caerphilly, Bridgend, Carmarthenshire, Wrexham, and Flintshire.
- 3.3 In conclusion, this report represents an independently developed methodology and set of estimates for required levels of advice on justiciable problems throughout Wales. However, the figures presented should be treated as *estimates* only and complex local factors may not have been accounted for by the statistical models upon which the estimates are based. Whilst this research is expected to be a useful source of information for the National Advice Network, Welsh Government, local service providers and other funders in their resource planning, it should be properly framed within a wider policy discussion which considers the potential severity of problems, their interconnectedness, and local insights.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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