

# CLG Committee Evidence

Homelessness Enquiry

Date 08/02/2016

Strategic Housing and Commissioning

# **CLG Committee Evidence submission Deadline 8<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

## **1. Executive summary**

- The main causes of homelessness are the same for single people, families and couples being loss of private rented accommodation, family and friend exclusions and relationship breakdown. Being discharged from hospital or released from prison can lead to homelessness for single people in particular.
- Local authorities can take both practical and strategic steps to tackle homelessness. They require the proactive engagement of health and social care
- The availability of social housing does have a link to homelessness in so far as being homeless being the clearest indicator of housing demand on an individual basis. It is also about accessibility as there is a trend of mainstream housing providers becoming more risk averse when accepting nominations of vulnerable households
- Local Authorities undertake a number of measures to tackle homelessness in terms of strategic, operation, commissioning and partnership working
- The extension of the duty of care to single people would result in an increase in demand on local authority services that would require an increase in resources
- Differences between big cities and rural areas are more down to geography and the way services are delivered than the type of interventions needed by individual people.
- Just as multi-agency approaches to an individual's homelessness are often required; a cross governmental approach to homelessness is also required
- The P1Es are a limited way of recording homelessness. A broader approach that includes households who are not in priority need but still in need of assistance will give a better picture of homelessness in the UK.

## **2. Cornwall Housing Limited**

Cornwall Housing Ltd is the Arm's Length Management Organisation of Cornwall Council. It is contracted to manage the Authority's housing and to fulfill its responsibilities towards those in housing need or homeless under the Housing Act 1996 Part VI & VII. These are:

- To maintain a housing register for the allocation of social housing within Cornwall
- To develop and deliver a homelessness strategy for Cornwall
- To provide housing advice to anyone within Cornwall on a 24/7 basis

- To undertake assessments of households that approach it for assistance under the terms of the HA 1996 Part VII and fulfill any duties that arise as a result

### **3. Differing causes of homelessness for households, couples and single people**

The constant big three causes of homelessness for all groups mentioned are:

- Loss of private rented accommodation which
- Family and friend exclusions
- Relationship breakdown which includes a large proportion of violent relationship breakdown

**3.1** The loss of private rented accommodation accounts for 20% of all approaches to Cornwall Housing for some kind assistance. However, it is far and away the largest cause of homelessness where the Authority accepts a main homelessness duty towards a household. As a cause of homelessness this has risen over the past few years.

Loss of Private rented accommodation	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016*
Total acceptances	72	116	76
% of total acceptances	30.5%	40%	55%

\*First two quarters only

**3.2** Family and friend exclusions accounted for 22% of approaches for housing assistance in 2014-2015 and they have been traditionally the major cause of homelessness reported via the P1Es by government. However in Cornwall family & friend exclusions as a cause of homelessness where a main housing duty has been accepted has declined from 28% of acceptances in 2013- 2014 to 23% in 2014-2015.

**3.3** Relationship breakdown, including violent breakdown of a relationship accounted for 17% of approaches to Cornwall Housing in 2014-2015. However in Cornwall family & friend exclusions as a cause of homelessness where a main housing duty has been accepted has risen from 20% of acceptances in 2013- 2014 to 23.5% in 2014-2015.

**3.4** It should be noted that violence within a relationship that leads to homelessness primarily but not exclusively affects women.

**3.5** Other causes of homelessness are more likely to affect single person households. Release from prison or discharge from an institution such as a hospital as a cause of homelessness primarily affects single

people. Precipitative discharge can lead to sleeping rough for the first time or a return to rough sleeping.

- 3.6** A survey of single homeless people accessing services across Cornwall in October 2015 showed that 33% said that their last accommodation was privately rented accommodation. 19% said their last accommodation was supported housing. Also prominent as reasons for the loss of accommodation prior to sleeping rough were relationship breakdown and family and friend exclusions with many people sofa surfing.

#### **4. Steps to tackle homelessness**

The Cornwall Homelessness Strategy published in 2015 outlines the key steps it will take to tackle homelessness in Cornwall. The Strategy's key drivers are based on the positive pathway approach which has been adopted by the Authority and is determined by the key stages in preventing, dealing with and then moving away from homelessness.

- 4.1** Minimising Demand in the first instance by educating people, especially young people, on the realities of homelessness and equipping them to manage and sustain tenancies so that the chances of having to seek homelessness assistance are reduced. The strategy identifies homelessness awareness training for non-housing professionals in order to identify housing difficulties early and be able to provide meaningful advice and signposting. This will also assist in preventing crisis presentations
- 4.2** Reducing Crisis Presentations by making sure that people can get effective early advice to prevent homeless before someone becomes roofless. Related steps include mediation to either assist people to remain accommodated permanently or to provide time to allow accommodation to be found thus preventing the risk of homelessness.
- 4.3** Providing effective services at the point of contact by making sure that 'every contact matters' and those households can be assisted on pathways that will help them away from homelessness. Reducing duplication and ensuring protocols are in place between agencies
- 4.4** Ensuring that Appropriate Accommodation Options are available and accessible for a range of people and households to move into and where appropriate move on from. Easing access to accommodation should be matched by a commitment to assist landlords, especially in the private sector by providing services to sustain tenancies once facilitated.

- 4.5** Facilitating the Move Away from Homelessness by ensuring clear opportunities to help people sustain tenancies and achieve their aspirations through education, training and employment

**5. The relationship between homelessness and the availability of social housing**

Cornwall has 11% social rented homes compared to the national average of 18%.

- 2,000 social housing lettings each year
- In the last 3 years 2,227 new affordable homes have been completed
- 29,000 units of social housing for rent.
- Cornwall has 3,486 households living in caravans or other mobile or temporary structures, more than 3 times the national average.
- 18% private rented accommodation

Cornwall Council's [Strategic Housing Framework](#) identified that Cornwall faces a combination of factors that make it harder for residents to meet their own needs in the housing market. The Strategic Housing Framework ascribes this to a combination of reductions in overall housing supply, limitations placed on the accessibility of housing and mortgage finance, unemployment and the seasonal nature of local employment market and reducing disposable incomes. This has led to an increase in demand for affordable housing and housing services. There has been a trend in recent years, attributed to the changes introduced by the government's welfare reforms whereby access to permanent social housing has become more difficult for more vulnerable households who have been nominated through Cornwall Homechoice. Households regarded as having unmet support needs or more likely to accrue arrears have been refused tenancies by registered providers. It is also a growing practice amongst housing providers to request a deposit or rent in advance. Further changes to welfare and the roll out of Universal Credit are likely to make social housing in accessible for many. The effect of this will be increased length of stays in temporary accommodation and supported housing and an increased reliance on the private rented sector or local authority owned/managed stock to meet authority's legal obligations to homeless people.

**6. Measures taken by local authorities to deal with the homeless**

Cornwall has put in place a number of measures to deal with homeless people. Cornwall Housing provides a Housing Options service across Cornwall in order to provide advice and information to those who approach it with the main aim of preventing homelessness.

- Homelessness Prevention Fund which is to facilitate eligible households remaining in their homes or to move to new ones without becoming homeless.
- Emergency and interim accommodation is available for those who are eligible to apply and unintentionally homeless.
- Cornwall Housing Private Lets Scheme to facilitate access to the Private rented sector for homeless households
- Youth Homelessness Gateway to facilitate access to supported housing for young people
- Mediation services
- Focus on targeted move-on to reduce length of stay in all forms of temporary accommodation

**6.1** Cornwall Council Education Health & Social Care through its Wellbeing, Universal Prevention & Early Intervention Team commissions a range of services that assist homeless people. These include:

- Supported Housing for those with support needs (including complex needs, mental health, and substance misuse issues)
- Street Outreach Services
- Community Outreach services
- Youth Supported housing
- Homeless family support services

**6.2** Partnership working with statutory agencies by developing meaningful pathways and protocols, for example Hospital discharge protocols to prevent bed blocking or the precipitative discharge of people to the streets can help prevent homelessness. Protocols between housing providers and prisons can ensure that those released to prison without accommodation do not become homeless and have more chance of not reoffending. The same applies to the protocols between Cornwall Housing and Residential rehabilitation services where Drug Alcohol Action Team figures that 50% of those who leave treatment without accommodation are likely to need to return to treatment. This protocol has ensured that 100% of those leaving rehabilitation have had somewhere to move on to.

## **7. The implications of the statutory duty of care, and possible extension to those in danger of homelessness, particularly single people**

In 2014- 2015 Cornwall Housing was approached by **10244** households seeking some form of housing advice. Of those households **6451** were single people. Of those 80% stated that

they felt threatened with homelessness. The extension of a duty of care to those in danger of homeless would have a significant resource implication for local authorities. The resource implication would fall in:

- 1) The prevention of homelessness which includes the saving of a tenancy and facilitating the move on into alternative accommodation. This in the majority of cases (91% in Cornwall) where homelessness is prevented requires a financial payment or commitment.
- 2) The provision of accommodation for those where it has not been possible to prevent homelessness. As an indicator of possible increased demand Cornwall Housing accepted a main (accommodation) duty towards 292 households in 2014- 2015; within the same period it received 1132 homeless applications under the HA 1996 Part VII and was required to accommodate 112 households in B&B

## **8. Different approaches to homelessness in big cities and in non-metropolitan areas**

Cornwall is a large unitary authority which covers 1,376 square miles in area. There are no major cities within Cornwall with the main settlements being market towns. Approaches to dealing with homelessness are similar to big cities but their delivery is by necessity different. Most metropolitan areas cover a small well populated area allowing for easier co-location of services and access to services by those who are homeless or threatened by it. Relatively poor transport in rural areas links mean greater distances and costs for people to travel. This has led to the development of more remote working with clients via telephone or the use of web based information. Cornwall uses 'Your Housing Options' which is web based advice as a tool to provide initial housing advice and assistance that does not require households to travel to Council offices.

## **9. The re-establishment of the cross government Ministerial Working Group on Preventing and Tackling Homelessness**

It is our view that homelessness requires a multi-agency approach especially in the current period of austerity. Non-housing agencies have a clear role in prevention and benefit from efforts to tackle it. The cross government group was welcome in bringing together health, housing and social care (an approach often mirrored when dealing with an individual

with complex needs and is homeless) and produced interesting outcomes that could be applied to local homelessness services.

## **10. How levels of homelessness are monitored and reported**

The traditional method used by government to record homelessness is the P1E's which monitor those people under the terms Housing Act 1996 Part VII. This concentrate on decisions made and do not show the full extent of approaches to Local Authorities. A wider approach is required to capture the true extent of homelessness. It would be useful to compare, if there are significant differences to the P1Es and the mechanisms for monitoring homelessness in Scotland and Wales.

Cornwall Housing monitors approaches to its services for housing advice and assistance. It also uses weekly monitoring statistics to manage its use of temporary accommodation. Homelessness Strategy Delivery Group Quarterly Report containing data on range of areas from housing and related services with the intention of determining a positive direction of travel or highlighting areas of work agencies should concentrate on. This process should enable the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Group target resources more effectively. As the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Group is a multi-agency group comprising of service commissioners from the statutory sector it will allow a clearer picture of how homelessness is a genuine cross-cutting issue and how interventions will be beneficial. The monitoring will enable agencies to have a better understanding of homelessness which can used to inform decisions around resource allocation within Health & Wellbeing and Safer Cornwall. Examples of the information to be shared are below:

- Those at risk of homelessness- seeking housing advice from Cornwall Housing
- Discharges from hospital and effectiveness of Hospital Discharge Protocol
- Prison releases and effectiveness of Priority and Prolific Offenders Protocol
- Rough Sleepers and the effectiveness of projects such as No Second Night Out and our Rough Sleeper Operational Group
- Young People
- The use and effectiveness of supported housing and other commissioned services in preventing and resolving homelessness of families and single people with complex needs
- Those entering residential rehabilitation and exits into suitable accommodation

Agencies across Cornwall have also for the past 5 years undertaken an annual survey of single homeless people

approaching services in the County. This has taken place around the CLG Rough Sleeper estimate and has allowed us to gather information on rough sleepers and sofa surfers within the County. It has also given the service users themselves the opportunity to express their opinions as to the nature and extent of services that they use. Cornwall Housing Limited is, in partnership with voluntary sector are establishing a mechanism to provide a clearer picture of who is sleeping rough at any time within Cornwall. This will enable agencies to target individuals in order to solve their homelessness as well as inform strategic commissioning decisions

## **11. The effectiveness of current legislative framework in England with a review of the different approaches taken in Scotland and Wales**

We cannot specifically comment of the differences between England, Scotland and Wales and would need to better understand the impact of the changes made to legislation in Scotland & Wales to assess the effectiveness of it.

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