



Swansea Public Services Board Joint Committee - 21 October 2021

Audit Wales Report - Rough Sleeping in Wales - Everyone's Problem; No One's Responsibility

Purpose:	To provide an update on how Swansea is tackling rough sleeping in the City and to respond to the recommendations of the Rough Sleeping in Wales – Everyone's Problem; No One's Responsibility Audit Wales (July 20).
Link to Well-being Objective:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To make Swansea a great place to live and age well.• To build strong communities with a sense of pride and belonging.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Members of the Public Services Board (PSB) commit to using the Wales Audit Complex Needs Tool whenever initiating a new partnership, service, project, or service review/evaluation that provides services for people with complex needs. See Appendix A.2) Members of the PSB assess their services against the '<i>Wales Audit characteristics of public services that are better placed to respond to people with complex needs</i>'. See Appendix B.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Audit Wales report, "Rough Sleeping in Wales – Everyone's Problem; No One's Responsibility", published in July 2020 looked at how public bodies can help to end people sleeping rough in Wales. The Audit Office examined how public bodies are responding to and addressing wicked issues using people sleeping rough as a tracer. They selected rough sleeping as their focus because rough sleeping is not simply a homelessness problem and cannot be treated as such.
- 1.2 The Audit Office have stated that too often individuals are helped off the streets and into temporary accommodation, but do not get the support needed to address the root causes of their initial homelessness and often end up back where they started. To end rough sleeping, solutions need

to address both accommodation and support needs, and requires many public bodies – for example, councils, the Police, health bodies, housing associations, the National Probation Service and others – to change how they work and what they do to tackle rough sleeping. Therefore the Audit Office have concluded that as statutory multi-agency boards, Public Service Boards are well placed to coordinate and drive these changes through their well-being assessments and plans.

1.3 The report concluded that whilst the statutory responsibility for addressing rough sleeping rests with the local housing authority, it requires other services and organisations to play their part. In particular it found that:

- The number of people sleeping rough is not widespread but they have complex needs and are often traumatised.
- Welsh Government has prioritised action in reducing rough sleeping but until recently strategic responses were too focused on housing and often overlooked the role of partners
- Operational services for people sleeping rough have not been sufficiently integrated and joined up
- Money is wasted because public bodies react to rather than prevent rough sleeping
- Covid19 provides public bodies with an opportunity to fundamentally change how they work together to address rough sleeping

1.4 The report has set out two broad recommendations:

- i. **Recommendation 1:** That public bodies and third sector partners should ensure they use data to plan the right future services, and to put in place effective data sharing protocols to ensure they respond effectively and safely to people sleeping rough.
- ii. **Recommendation 2:** that public bodies use the complex needs self-reflection tool to improve how they can jointly address complex needs in the future (*this self-reflection tool can be found at appendix 1*).

1.5 Swansea has a long-standing robust approach to tackle rough sleeping and the Local Authority's Homelessness Strategy (2018 – 2022) provides a clear framework, which focusses on the prevention of homelessness. Within the Strategy there is a specific objective to tackle and reduce the need to sleep rough in Swansea, and since the implementation of the Strategy a number of actions have been achieved that are very much aligned with the recommendations set out in the Audit Report.

1.6 The following gives a brief overview of the current scale of rough sleeping in Swansea, how this is being tackled, and what actions need to be considered in response to the Audit Office recommendations.

2. Rough Sleeping in Swansea

- 2.1 In terms of the scale of the issue, prior to the pandemic, the number of people sleeping rough in Swansea averaged between 15/20 people per night. After March 2020, the numbers of rough sleepers reduced greatly, particularly in the two lockdown periods where at times there were episodes when there were no individuals sleeping rough in Swansea. Since the reopening of the day and night time economy, the number of people sleeping rough has been on the increase, and in September 2021 there was an average of 9 rough sleepers per night.
- 2.2 It is important that rough sleeping is not considered in isolation. In order to effectively tackle the issue consideration must also be given to those people with complex needs who are vulnerably housed. Whilst the number of rough sleepers in Swansea continues to be kept to a minimum, there has been a rapid increase in the numbers of people in temporary accommodation.
- 2.3 At the end of December 2019, there were 35 people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Swansea. However, by the end of December 2020, this had increased to approximately 75, and currently this figure stands at 90 people.
- 2.4 The pressure on temporary accommodation is primarily as a result of three factors.
 - i. At the start of the pandemic, Welsh Government issued guidance to local authorities that all homeless households are to be considered vulnerable during the pandemic. Therefore, temporary accommodation was made available to those households who would not normally be in priority need and to households with no recourse to public funds. This was to ensure that people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough have the support and resources needed to protect themselves and adhere to public health guidance on hygiene or isolation. Whilst there is temporary supported accommodation provision available for non-priority households in Swansea, this provision was insufficient to deal with the increased levels of demand. Welsh Government have indicated that this will continue for the foreseeable future and they are intending to legislate to make the policy change permanent.
 - ii. There has been an increase in the number of homeless presentations over the last 12 months.
 - iii. As a result of the pandemic there has been a reduction on the number of suitable one bed properties across the whole housing sector being available to move single people on to.

3. Response to Audit Wales Recommendations

- 3.1 **Recommendation 1:** The Audit Report recommends that public bodies and third sector partners use data to plan the right future services, and to put in place effective data sharing protocols to ensure they respond effectively and safely to people sleeping rough. There is clear evidence that Swansea meets this recommendation.
- 3.2 In terms of data collection, live data is collected by the Homelessness Service on all individuals rough sleeping and in temporary accommodation, which enables it and its partners to rapidly respond to any person that is found sleeping rough in the City. The Rough Sleeper Intervention Team (Wallich) operates seven days a week and is responsible for ensuring that support is provided to every person within 24 hours. This support focuses on moving the person on to more suitable accommodation as quickly and safely as possible.
- 3.3 At the start of the pandemic, and in line with the Welsh Government priorities, Swansea's Homelessness Cell was developed and the Cell continues to meet on a fortnightly basis. This is jointly chaired by the Local Authority's Supporting People and Homelessness Teams and is a multi-agency meeting to ensure that there is a joined up approach to monitoring data relating to rough sleeping in order to provide effective and timely support to individuals who are rough sleeping rough and in temporary or supported accommodation. There are a range of services that attend the meeting including the Police, Substance Misuse agencies, the Homelessness Outreach Nurse, Probation, Crisis, and other appropriate third sector organisations. Live data is shared at each meeting which enables services to respond quickly to any issues that arise both at an operational and strategic level. This has been a positive example of partnership working and all partners have agreed that the Cell will continue long term, post-pandemic.
- 3.4 **Recommendation 2:** The second recommendation looks at how public bodies can work together to address complex needs and use the complex need self-reflection tool to improve joint working in the future. In addition to the development of the Homelessness Cell, there are a number of ways that demonstrate how the Local Authority is working with partners to address complex needs and rough sleeping.
- 3.5 In 2019, Swansea commissioned a large-scale Housing First project. This came out of an identified need to provide a long-term solution for the most entrenched rough sleepers in Swansea. This project provides intensive support to people with complex needs to thrive in their own tenancy. It requires a partnership approach involving a range of agencies including RSLs, Substance Misuse Agencies, Health (the Homelessness Outreach Nurse) and Mental Health support. Already Housing First has had some very good outcomes that have had a measurable impact on reducing the levels of rough sleeping in Swansea.

- 3.6 Further examples of partnership working include the monthly Street Vulnerability MARAC meetings and the Complex Needs meetings held every two weeks. Both these meetings are attended by a range of public bodies and third sector organisations and their objective is to try and identify positive solutions for those with complex needs who are either sleeping rough or at risk of doing so.
- 3.7 The Welsh Government has recently announced a new policy initiative called rapid rehousing. This will require all Local Authorities to adopt a rapid rehousing approach as a way of tackling complex needs and reducing rough sleeping. Rapid rehousing is an approach where homeless people should be provided with permanent housing as quickly as possible, rather than spending long periods of time in shelters or temporary accommodation. The Audit Report supports this approach and for it to work it requires public bodies and third sector organisations to work together to provide both suitable housing and intensive support to those with complex needs. Whilst challenging, this is an approach that Swansea supports and as well as the implementation of Housing First, resources have been increased to develop the rapid rehousing approach following the uplift in the Housing Support Grant in 2020/21.
- 3.8 The Local Authority is currently carrying out a Temporary Supported Housing review in conjunction with key partners. This will no doubt have a positive impact on how complex needs are addressed by the homelessness and housing support sector going forward. As part of this process relevant public bodies, partners and service users will be fully consulted on what matters to people and will influence how services are commissioned going forward.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Whilst there is strong evidence in Swansea that there is a joined up approach to tackling rough sleeping, it is acknowledged that this is a very complex issue and therefore further work is needed with partners if rough sleeping is to be eradicated. It is therefore recommended that all relevant public bodies and third sector organisations consider the Wales Audit Improvement Tools (i.e. Appendix A and B) in order to identify areas where they can improve services to people with complex needs and assist in reducing rough sleeping.

5. Next steps/ Actions

For the Homelessness Service:

- 5.1 To ensure that the Homelessness Cell continues and is supported by all the relevant organisations. The Homelessness Cell will review the complex needs tool to identify any improvements that can be made to current working arrangements.

- 5.2 To review the Homelessness Strategy and include an updated action plan within the Housing Support Programme Strategy (April 22).
- 5.3 To work with Supporting People to develop a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (Oct 22) to ensure the principles of rapid rehousing are embedded in the Housing Support Grant programme going forward.
- 5.4 To complete the Temporary Supported Housing Review in conjunction with the Supporting People Team and ensure that partners and service users are fully engaged and consulted throughout the process.

For the Public Service Board:

- 5.5 Members of the PSB commit to using the Wales Audit Complex Needs Tool whenever initiating a new partnership, service, project or service review/evaluation that will provide services for people with complex needs. See Appendix A.
- 5.6 Members of the PSB assess their services against the Wales Audit characteristics of public services that are better placed to respond to people with complex needs. See Appendix B.

Report Author: Steve Porter

Organisation: Swansea Council, Housing Service

Appendices:

Appendix A - Audit Wales Complex Needs Tool

Appendix B - Wales Audit characteristics of public services that are better placed to respond to people with complex needs