



Crisis UK
Swansea Council, Scrutiny Working Group on Homelessness
14 May 2018

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for homeless people. We work in England, Scotland and Wales, providing support for homeless people and campaigning for change. Our multi-disciplinary team in South Wales, based in Swansea, includes expertise in housing, adult learning, employability and mental health. We provide direct advice, education, training and support for people who are homeless, have been homeless in the last 2 years or are at risk of becoming homeless. We carry out research to understand homelessness in Wales and across Great Britain, and campaign for the changes needed to end it for good.

What is working well

- Swansea Council's services show understanding of people affected by homelessness and particularly adapting to their vulnerabilities and showing sympathy towards them in decisions about, for example, priority need.
- Crisis welcomed the council's openness to meeting homeless people to help develop its homelessness strategy and approach. Crisis was pleased to facilitate two sessions for homeless people to meet and discuss issues with council officers and with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Energy & Building Services.
- The multiagency approach that Crisis is involved in with Housing Options, The Wallich, temporary accommodation, and health services works well. This leads to effective referrals to and from Crisis services in the Swansea area.
- The Bed and Breakfast pilot is a good example of an effective partnership approach which includes joint appointments and targeted individual support whilst people are in emergency B&B accommodation.
- The council's use of the homelessness prevention fund and Discretionary Housing Payments has been good.
- The council's commitment to developing a Housing First approach is very welcome and would complement existing provision.

Gaps and what could be improved

Crisis' consultations and research have identified the importance of adopting a 'housing-led' model in which everyone experiencing or threatened with homelessness is resettled as quickly as possible into their own tenancies in permanent accommodation, with support provided where needed. Housing First is a central feature of this housing-led system for those who require it. Homelessness should be prevented wherever possible but when it does occur, services should be in place to make it brief and non-recurring. To fully realise this we recommend Swansea Council follows this approach:

1. Preventing homelessness, building on the work following the Housing Act 2014

- Whilst there is recognition that ex-offenders are no longer identified as having priority need there could be some improvement in work with ex-offenders, particularly implementing the national pathway for people leaving the secure estate.
- Lack of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Neath Port Talbot is putting pressure on provision in Swansea. We would encourage Swansea and NPT to work closely together to explore options to resolve this.

- Reduced resources for social services is evident with fewer people getting support they need, e.g. people on the streets with brain injuries or learning disabilities.

2. Rapid response to help people into housing as soon as possible

- Access to suitable, affordable accommodation in both private rented and social housing sectors needs to be improved. There is evidence that the cost of private rented accommodation (e.g. bonds, agency fees etc) is a barrier and that homeless people, who are among the most vulnerable in society, are not fully benefiting from housing association accommodation.
- Tenancy Support Service should start immediately to ensure a tenancy has the best chance of success.

3. Ongoing support for people with complex needs

- There is very strong international evidence for a Housing First approach for people with complex needs. Crisis welcomes Swansea Council's commitment to developing this and encourages the council to make full use of Welsh Government's national principles document (published in February 2018) and to set housing targets to ensure there is enough provision for accommodation.
- Dual diagnosis remains an issue, particularly people with mental health needs unable to access the Community Mental Health Team support because of drug dependency issues.

4. Plan to end homelessness

Throughout this year, which is Crisis' 50th anniversary, we have been working on a plan that sets out what it takes to end homelessness for good. The plan will be published in June 2018 and we would welcome the opportunity to explore this further with the council to help inform its work to tackle homelessness.

For further information please contact southwales@crisis.org.uk