
*Regional
Homelessness
Strategy-
Key themes and
priorities*

September 2018

DRAFT

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What is the purpose of this strategy?

This plan highlights the key themes and priorities in relation to how Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Powys will prevent and tackle homelessness over the coming years.

The themes and priorities have been developed from an overarching review of homelessness service across the region, the detail of the work undertaken in Carmarthenshire can be found by accessing the following link:

<\\ntcarmcc\cfp\Housing\Public Docs>

For each theme, detailed actions will be developed for Carmarthenshire. This plan gives examples of what these actions will look like, with a more detailed action plan to follow early in 2019.

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What is the direction of travel to prevent and tackle homelessness?



Diagram 1: Taken from the 'Homeless Hub', Canada <http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention>

The diagram illustrates our direction of travel. The illustration at the top indicates how, traditionally, services and resources have been focussed. The majority are centred on providing the 'emergency response', i.e. are triggered when a household is homeless.

To make services more effective and prevent people falling into crisis we should be thinking differently and focussing resources differently. We want to move to the bottom illustration in order that support is delivered early, and that people can access help before they fall into crisis.

This plan will outline our desire to shift the current approach, by drawing resources and demand from the 'emergency response', and triggering our homelessness duties, to the following two key areas;

- Community-based support to prevent homelessness before it becomes a crisis; and
- Developing support and accommodation options, particularly for those with complex needs who are creating demands on a variety of services.

What is the context?

National

This plan aligns with the 'Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by making sure we think about the long-term impact of our decisions, work better with people, communities and each other, and prevent persistent problems re-occurring. To deliver this plan will also require close collaboration and partnerships with key stakeholders.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 introduced new duties for local authorities and its partners by:

- Putting the prevention of homelessness at the very heart of the homelessness agenda; and
- Bringing the use of the private rented sector into a far more prevalent position in relation to discharging homelessness duties.

We have done a lot of work in Carmarthenshire to focus on prevention but we know we need to do more. A recent Welsh Audit Office report still highlighted how “local authorities continue to focus on managing people in crisis rather than stop homelessness from happening in the first place”.

As a result we want to continue to change cultures in relation to preventing homelessness, working more across departments and agencies.

Regional

This plan has been developed across the region and aims to ensure sufficient options and opportunities for local people to access affordable or social housing and to enable them to remain within the community of their choice.

The Welsh Language and promotion of bi-linguism plays a key role across the region. It is acknowledged that communities are continuing to change due to the lack of affordable housing and employment, and this change is having a direct impact on the Welsh language and culture. This plan will ensure people are able to access prevention services and have a range of affordable accommodation and support options.

From Carmarthenshire's perspective, we will need to ensure that accommodation options for homeless people are linked with how we utilise our current supply of accommodation, both social and private rented. This will particularly be the case for

young single people as well as families. We will also ensure that our successful Affordable Homes Delivery Plan reflects the priorities contained in this plan.

Above all we want to help people at ‘the right time, in the right place’ and to empower local communities.

We will focus on developing more preventative services, reduce crisis interventions and provide more accommodation and support options for those that need it.

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What's happening to homelessness in the region?

In order to plan how we take services forward, it is important to first take stock. As has been said each of the authorities have undertaken reviews of how homelessness services are currently delivered and how they are working in partnership with all key stakeholders.

Clearly, there are differences in each area; but it is possible to identify some key themes.

1. Since the introduction of the recent Housing Act the number of households triggering homelessness duties has generally increased.

Local Authority	Number of households triggering homeless duties 2015-16	Number of households triggering homeless duties 2017-18
Carmarthenshire	1044	1488
Ceredigion	432	390
Pembrokeshire	741	855
Powys	432	453
Total	2,649	3,186

It can be seen that Carmarthenshire has not only the highest number of households triggering homelessness duties but has also shown the biggest increase over the two year period.

The high number triggering homeless duties is reflective of the population in Carmarthenshire and the number of private rented properties. The increase reflects our current approach where our partners help us identify those in crisis. This is seen in the number of cases we receive which on average amounts to 3,000 in a year (1,900 on average judged to exhibit a threat of homelessness). There is clearly further work needed with partners and support providers to ensure we intervene earlier.

When homeless duties are triggered local authorities work with those cases to prevent and relieve the situation. As a result of our advice, prevention and relief work in Carmarthenshire last year 162 cases were eventually classed as homeless. It should be recognised that these cases were not rough sleepers and were mainly housed in good quality accommodation provided by ourselves or alternatively with family and friends as an interim measure. Clearly we continue to work those cases to source a long term housing solution.

2. *There is increasing pressure on Housing Options / ‘the emergency response’.*

The Housing Options Teams’ are carefully managing their resources to meet increased demands. We do know, however, that if demand continues to rise there is less time dedicated to each case and the options available to assist and help the household resolve their housing issue will become increasingly difficult to access.

As a result we want to better manage this demand by switching attention to more preventative services and managing supply by delivering more appropriate affordable housing options.

3. *People are approaching Council homelessness services with ever more complex needs.*

Key feedback from those delivering the ‘emergency response’ and discharging the authority’s homelessness duties, was the increase in the complexity of the issues being faced by some households who are approaching them.

The reasons for this need to be explored in more depth, but the evidence suggests that those with a variety of complex mental ill health, substance misuse and offending issues are unable to sustain their housing and are returning regularly for help and assistance.

4. *Less affordable options for single people, (especially those under 35).*

The options for single people, which are both affordable and sustainable, are becoming increasingly difficult to access. The table below indicates the proportion of single people on each Council’s current housing register.

Local Authority	% of households with one bed housing need on housing register
Carmarthenshire	60%
Ceredigion	49%
Pembrokeshire	61%
Powys	44%

As the table illustrates, the demand for single person accommodation would appear high. The proportion of households on waiting lists with a need for one bed roomed accommodation far exceeds the proportion of one bed properties available within the social housing stock. (This becomes even more pronounced when you omit one bed accommodation designated for older people).

The private rented sector was highlighted as a key partner in meeting these needs, but the review did suggest an ever-greater reluctance for landlords to get engaged in this agenda.

Landlords are reportedly leaving the market, not only because of increased regulation, (such as 'Rent Smart Wales'); but also, welfare reform which is being perceived as an increasing risk when letting properties.

5. Challenges of the introduction of Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a benefit being introduced across the UK to replace six existing means tested benefits. It is already in place, to a degree, in all four authorities for claimants who have less complex claims. It will be going live for all new claimants, and anyone who experiences a change of circumstance from December 2018.

All reviews have flagged the concerns of agencies, both working in housing and beyond, in relation to how this new approach will impact upon vulnerable people and the impact it will have on them being able to pay their rent and retain their housing.

6. All services are facing on-going financial challenges

This makes it even more important that we think differently and innovatively in how we provide the services in the future, both in terms of prevention and accommodation and support options.

How we tackle Prevention, accommodation and support options in Carmarthenshire?

Key features of our approach involve:

We have re-aligned the service using existing financial services to try to tackle the main reasons for homelessness. These involved problems with their private sector home, affordability (problems with paying mortgage, rent arrears), relationship break down and property suitability.

We created a specific team of Housing Advisors by re-training existing staff to deal with the most common causes of homelessness we identified through our research locally.

We have created a "hub" of specialist advisors and partners to tackle these main issues presented. The main parts involve:

- Housing Advisors — who undertake in depth advice and support to prevent homelessness or find alternative accommodation.
- Occupational Therapists—who support re-housing disabled people and those with serious health issues.
- Private Sector Support Officers/Environmental Health Officers—to support tenants and landlords in the private rented sector.
- Home Improvement Officers —to support keeping people in their own home by facilitating adaptations and other essential improvement work.

Our Advice and Tenancy Support Team are co-located with key partners:

- Care and Repair (specialists in helping older people)
- Shelter (providing support to prevent homelessness and providing specialist money advice),
- Pobl (providing bonds enabling access to the private rented sector)
- The Walich who provide mediation services.

Partners provide support, improving capacity and by providing expertise on the key matters which cause customers to make contact with the service and contribute to homelessness.

We have also improved relationship with private landlords by developing our own lettings agency. We have developed our partnership with landlords and manage 160

private lets on behalf of landlords which have had a significant impact on re-housing homeless households.

Local authorities are required to offer temporary accommodation to those households who are homeless and may be determined in priority need.

We acquire temporary accommodation stock through the private rented sector and is mainly located in the three main townships of Ammanford, Llanelli and Carmarthen. The stock consists of 38 units of single person accommodation and 59 units of family accommodation.

The majority of the temporary accommodation stock is located in Llanelli and is reflective of the high homelessness demand and the need for families/ individuals to remain in this area. The single person accommodation units are managed in-house with the help of the landlords and the family accommodation is outsourced and managed by Cartrefi Hafod Housing Association. All the accommodation meets the appropriate legal standard and is visited on a regular basis.

Areas of Good Practice in Carmarthenshire

Wales Audit Office Report – How Local Government manages demand – Homelessness published in January 2018 highlighted Carmarthenshire as:

- “a good example of how to deal with service demand by trying to resolve a people’s issues at the first point of contact”
- “having a good relationship with private landlords and that considerable investment has been made in developing and managing these relationships”
- “one of the authorities who are improving joint working through co-location with partners working alongside the service. Thus enabling a more options to resolve people’s homelessness situation.”

Our key priorities – What are we going to do?

1. Continue to evolve and harness community-based services to assist in the prevention of homelessness

We need to manage the increased numbers of households triggering homelessness duties. As a result, we need to find a way of working to get to people earlier and 'turn off' this demand.

There are community services currently aiming to do this. For example, the Regional Supporting People Plan is advocating the development of locality-based support services across the region and this is in the process of being adopted. These services will play a key role. It is not just these services, however. Health services are moving into the community, Social Services are recognising the importance of getting to people early, and developments like 'Local Area Coordination' & 'Community Connectors' are vital to tap into.

Community led organisations, such as food banks, are in a position where they can spot vulnerable people early and draw in the support they need.

We will also work closely with social housing providers, both Council and Housing Associations. Their housing officers are the 'eyes and ears' on the estates they work; and their local intelligence will be harnessed to ensure support can be delivered early to any household facing housing issues.

Actions for Carmarthenshire:

- **Explore how the existing 'locality' services are modelled and how they can adapt to meet homelessness prevention objectives; and**
- **Develop a plan with key departments and external partners outlining how we can work more effectively in the heart of communities to prevent homelessness.**

2. By utilising intelligence, explore how we can focus support to households in those localities which are producing the highest proportion of homelessness cases in order to prevent it.

From research undertaken as part of the review in Carmarthenshire, it was established that those triggering homelessness duties are often living in certain areas. There are 58 council wards across the County; over 50% of households found homeless / at threat of homelessness came from just 10 of these wards.

We need to develop this intelligence across the region. We will identify the wards which are experiencing most homelessness, and then model our early intervention services, so they are targeting these wards / households and preventing homelessness.

Actions for Carmarthenshire:

- **Review all prevention services in the wards exhibiting the highest incidences of homelessness. The exercise should involve mapping all services currently being provided and consideration given to the contact with potentially homeless households; and**
- **Partnerships and protocols need to be established in these areas to prevent homelessness. Consideration given to existing assets and community settings that can be utilised to deliver this partnership working. For example, food banks, libraries, etc.**

3. Utilise IT systems and technology to prevent homelessness by ensuring systems are in place which flag up issues early to trigger help and advice as early as possible.

IT can have an important role to play in identifying issues early. Ceredigion already has a system in place which allows households and the agencies they are working with to upload their housing needs on line. This then allows a response early and can 'turn off' demands on the frontline service.

A similar system is now being commissioned by ourselves and Powys. When establishing these systems, it is essential they are developed in full partnership with partner agencies working in communities and that they can trigger responses for support before any statutory duty is triggered.

Actions for Carmarthenshire:

- **Implement a new IT system (January 2019) to help manage our housing allocations and ensure housing needs are recorded and acted upon as effectively and as early as possible. In developing this system, we will ensure it 'flags' potential homelessness and allows a swift support response; and**
- **All agencies working in locality areas, who are likely to work with people at threat of homelessness, will be trained in how it works, how to access and complete.**

4. In partnership with key agencies explore how a multi-agency case management approach can evolve to meet the needs of households who revolve around the homeless system and place demands on a variety of services.

The reviews found that all authorities are struggling to meet the needs of those with the most complex needs. These might not constitute large numbers of households, but the demands they create are significant; not just on housing services but Health, Social Services, criminal justice and substance misuse services.

Other local authority areas in Wales are trying to meet the needs of this group by establishing partnerships to 'case manage' the support these households receive. For example, Neath Port Talbot has established a 'Street Vulnerable Multi Agency Risk Assessment Committee', chaired by South Wales Police and involving a variety of agencies.

This type of partnership approach, which doesn't simply end once the household is housed, will be explored to identify if it can help reduce demands on homelessness services and improve the outcomes for those households who often 'revolve' through the homelessness system.

Actions for Carmarthenshire:

- **Housing Options to set up and lead a 'Street Vulnerable Multi Agency Risk Assessment Group' involving key agencies, such as the Police, Probation, Mental Health and Substance Misuse. We will discuss the development of a Carmarthenshire approach for those with the most complex needs. The purpose of which is to ensure a joined up approach to resolving support requirements and housing need;**
- **We will dedicate an existing member of our Advice and Tenancy Support Team to facilitate the housing response and play a full part in any case management approach developed; and**
- **Further develop our out-reach work to any identified "street homeless", to make sure we are able to respond quickly.**

5. In partnership with local stakeholders and other statutory services, each explore whether a 'Housing First' approach can be developed to support those with the most complex needs.

In partnership with the multi-agency approach described above, we will also explore taking a 'Housing First' approach to meeting the needs of the households with the most complex needs.

What is Housing First?

“Housing First’ is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centres on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional support and services as needed” -WG 2018

For more details the Welsh Government have published Housing First – National Principles & Guidance - <https://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/180206-housing-first-en.pdf>

The approach is being advocated by both UK and Welsh Governments and international evidence suggests it leads to far more positive outcomes for these households in relation to the sustainability of their accommodation.

By taking this approach, authorities will work over and above their duties. Any service will ignore issues like ‘priority need’ or ‘intentionality’; the housing provided will sit outside the normal allocations process and be made available on a permanent basis.

Each authority will explore with partners, such as housing providers, Health and Social Services. If there is an appetite to develop this type of service and, if so, plan and commission a service to reflect local needs.

The concept is based around the principle that people with chronic housing and support needs should be offered ‘normal’ housing first with support built around their needs, rather than expecting them to pass through a hostel or other interim housing where they are prepared for longer term accommodation which they would move on to. The concept has been applied most specifically with people who are rough sleepers or at least very marginally housed, and who have chronic and complex support needs.

Actions for Carmarthenshire:

- **Consider with partners whether there is an appetite to develop a ‘Housing First’ project in Carmarthenshire; and**
- **Use the multi-agency case management process to identify those individuals who would benefit from the approach.**

6. Each authority to explore with their Housing Association and private landlord partners how to develop affordable and sustainable housing options for single people

As discussed, it is not just those with the most complex issues who are placing pressures on the emergency response. Each authority is facing pressure securing housing options for single people.

Actions for Carmarthenshire:

- Review the availability of affordable single person accommodation in current supply;
- Develop new models of affordable single people accommodation in the areas of demand, moving away from large concentrations to more manageable dispersed provision; and
- Remodel the provision of temporary accommodation and supported accommodation for young people, making sure wider issues such as employment and training and health impact are addressed as is possible.

7. Each authority to develop close partnership working with DWP/Job Centre+ to mitigate any impact the introduction of Universal Credit may have on household's ability to retain their tenancies.

The implementation of this new benefit system has been flagged up as a challenge. Work is on-going in all four authorities to prepare for this, but it needs to be a key objective of this plan to ensure we are working in close partnership with DWP and Job Centre+ colleagues. This will ensure that the required help and support is available for all households making the transition to the new benefit.

Actions for Carmarthenshire:

- Implementation of Universal Credit Action Plan from December 2018

Each of our priorities looks to explore how we can refocus services, so they are working to either prevent households becoming homeless or offer the right support and accommodation options to avoid them becoming homeless again.