

# THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE

## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

SEPTEMBER 2019



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This report has been prepared  
for presentation to the National  
Assembly under the Government  
of Wales Act 1998.

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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

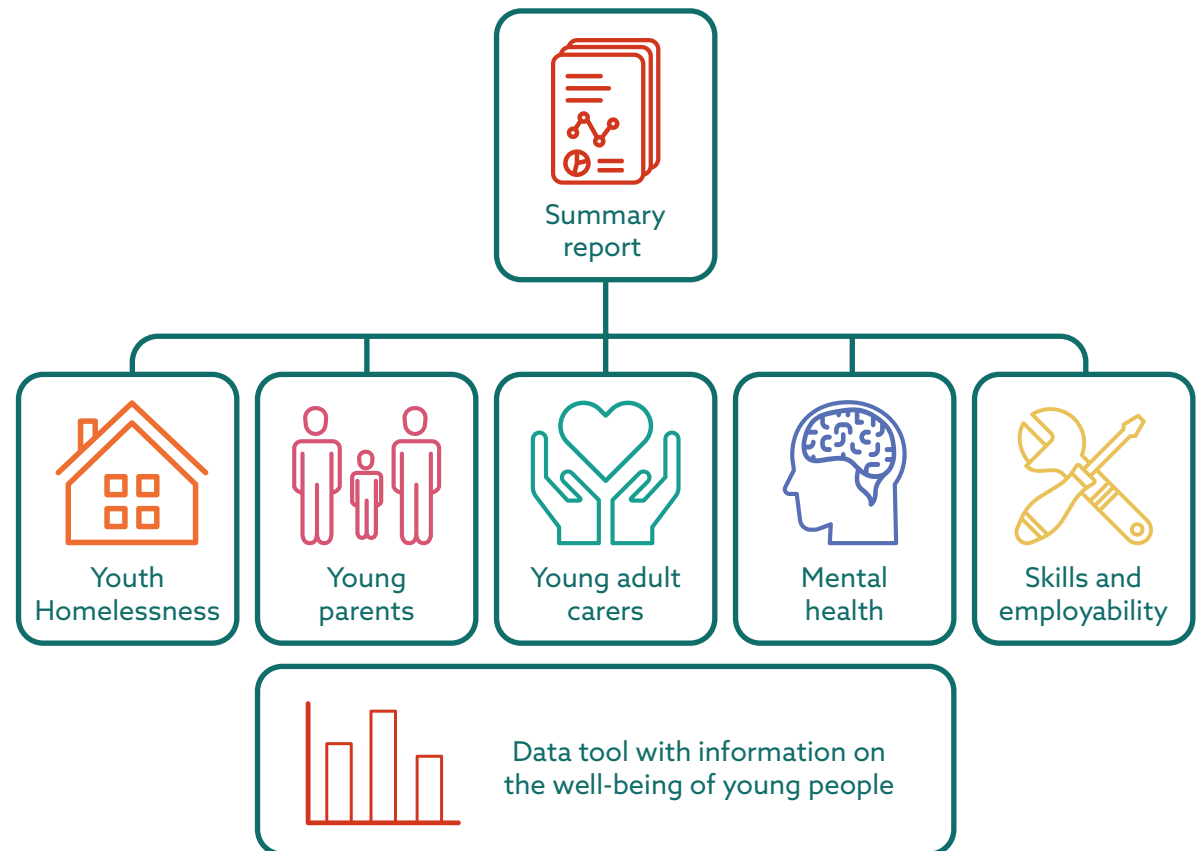
About our wider work on the well-being of young people

## Joint-working

We have been working with other organisations to examine a common theme of 'Youth'. The education inspectorate Estyn published its report on **youth support services** in July 2018. Healthcare Inspectorate Wales published its **review of healthcare services for young people** in March 2019. Care Inspectorate Wales published its **report on care experienced by children and young people** in June 2019.

## Our work

We looked at the Welsh Government's work to support the well-being of young people in Wales. Well-being is a broad concept, so we have focussed our work on five topics: youth homelessness; young adult carers; young parents; mental health; and skills and employability. We are publishing seven products based on our work, including this report. The diagram provides a link to each product.



## About this report on youth homelessness

We looked at homelessness because it has a major impact on a young person's physical, emotional and mental well-being. It can seriously inhibit young people's life chances and opportunities over the longer term. Also, tackling homelessness is a priority for the Welsh Government.

This report is not a comprehensive audit of youth homelessness services. Our focus is what the Welsh Government does to support organisations helping young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We give our observations based on interviews with Welsh Government officials and organisations working with young people. We also reviewed Welsh Government strategies, plans, research evidence and statistics. The diagram provides an overview of this report and you can use it to move to the different sections that explain what we found.



### A picture of youth homelessness

Youth homelessness is growing and some groups are particularly at risk.



### How much is being spent?

It is not entirely clear how much is being spent on homelessness and there is no specific data on spending on young people.



### Who else is involved

Lots of different organisations have a role to play helping young homeless people and preventing homelessness.



### What is the Welsh Government trying to achieve

The general aim is to end youth homelessness. This is underpinned by several plans and strategies.



### Opportunities for improvement in the Welsh Government's approach

It could base its plans on better evidence and be clearer on its own role in improving and joining up support for young people.

# A PICTURE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

**Key facts on homelessness. [Click here to see an interactive version of the data](#).** There is more information on homelessness in our [data tool](#)<sup>1</sup>

**Applicants aged 16-to-24 years old who were unintentionally homeless, eligible for support and in priority need**

Numbers increased from 570 people in 2015-16 to 684 in 2017-18.

During 2017-18, in 531 cases (78%) the applicant accepted an offer of settled, suitable accommodation.

**Applicants aged 16-to-24 years old who were homeless and eligible for support**

Numbers increased from 2,031 people in 2015-16 to 3,153 in 2017-18

During 2017-18, in 1,332 cases (42%) councils successfully helped the applicant find accommodation. In 1,173 cases (37%) the council was unsuccessful in helping the applicant find somewhere to live. [Our data tool gives more information.](#)

**Applicants aged 16-to-24 years old who were threatened with homelessness and eligible for support**

Numbers increased from 1,968 people in 2015-16 to 2,088 in 2017-18.

During 2017-18, in 1,334 cases (64%) councils successfully prevented the applicant from becoming homeless.

Source: Homelessness Data Collection, Welsh Government

## ■ FOOTNOTES

1 Data in this report may differ slightly from our data tool which includes live data updates.

**Young people aged 16 to 24 living in temporary accommodation who took part in research** for the homeless charity Llamau and Cardiff University<sup>2</sup> were more likely than the general population to:



Leave school with no qualifications. Most had been suspended from school at some point, over half were not happy at school and one in five were bullied.



Have been admitted to a psychiatric ward in the last six months or have a psychiatric disorder. Very few of the young people with a psychiatric disorder were getting the help they needed.



Have visited the GP recently.



28 of the young women had been pregnant at least once. Two-thirds of the women had a miscarriage, and one in ten did not continue the pregnancy. Just under one in six women kept the baby.



Over half of the young people had experienced some kind of abuse.



Have used non-prescription drugs in their lifetime.

The **Wales Centre for Public Policy** reported that young people who are care leavers, have a disability, or are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, are more likely to become homeless.

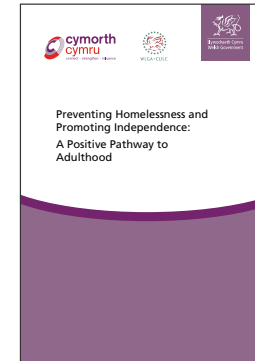
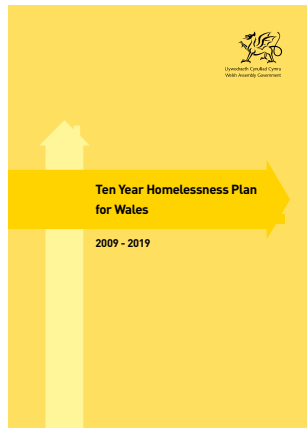
**■ FOOTNOTES**

2 121 young people took part in the research.

# WHAT IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

The Welsh Government said what it would do to prevent homelessness in its [Ten Year Homelessness Plan 2009-2019](#). The Plan said that reducing youth homelessness and supporting care leavers was a priority.

The Welsh Government introduced the [Housing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) which put extra duties on councils to address housing needs. New duties on councils include a duty to help anyone threatened with homelessness within the next 56 days<sup>3</sup> and to help any homeless person find a home. Councils must also write local homelessness strategies and review them every four years.



The Welsh Government worked with young people and organisations who help young people to write [A Positive Pathway to Adulthood in 2016](#). The Pathway gives advice for organisations working to prevent youth homelessness and promote independence. Organisations can choose whether to follow the advice.

[The Welsh Government's national strategy \(2017\)](#) promises to reduce homelessness for all ages but does not make a specific commitment on youth homelessness.

[The Welsh Government's Extending Entitlement Guidance 2002](#) sets out what support all young people are entitled to under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. [The Welsh Government commissioned a review of its guidance in 2018](#) but has not decided whether to update it.

## FOOTNOTES

- 3 Beginning the day the person is notified that they are eligible for support.

The Welsh Government has written other documents relevant to preventing youth homelessness:

[Standards for Improving the Health and Well-being of Homeless People and Specific Vulnerable Groups](#)

[National Pathway for Homelessness Services to Children, Young People and Adults in the Secure Estate](#)

[When I am Ready – Good Practice Guide](#)

[Rough Sleeping Action Plan](#)

[Housing First \(HF\) – National Principles and Guidance for Wales](#)



The Welsh Government does not currently set targets for councils to prevent or relieve homelessness or youth homelessness. Councils record information on how many people they have helped find somewhere to live. [We have included the information councils record in our data tool.](#)



# WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED?

Who else is involved in supporting young people who are homeless or could become homeless?



Councils have a legal duty to help people who are homeless or might become homeless.



Housing Associations and third-sector organisations also help young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.



Health boards should work with councils and other organisations to improve health outcomes for homeless people and prevent homelessness using **Standards set by the Welsh Government**.



Other public-sector organisations including schools and the police, can help by identifying young people who are homeless or become homeless and putting them in touch with organisations who can help.



The **End Youth Homelessness Cymru coalition** started in 2017. The coalition includes academics, elected members of national and local government, business and voluntary and community organisations.

# HOW MUCH IS BEING SPENT?

The Welsh Government has given money to councils and other organisations to prevent homelessness through its Homelessness Prevention Grant. It also gave councils money through the **Supporting People Programme**<sup>4</sup>, although this money was for housing support services more generally, not just homelessness. Councils may provide Supporting People services themselves or through other organisations. From 2019-20, money for the programme will be combined with money for homelessness prevention in a new Housing Support Grant to councils.



The table below shows how much the Welsh Government has spent on the Homelessness Prevention Grant and Supporting People Programme. The table also shows extra Welsh Government money spent on homelessness, including to help councils meet their Housing (Wales) Act 2014 duties. The Welsh Government does not know exactly how much money is being spent on youth homelessness because most of its spending on homelessness has been to help people of all ages.

## ■ FOOTNOTES

- 4 The Supporting People Programme is not just about preventing homelessness. The Programme aims to help vulnerable people stay in their homes. Our previous report on **The Welsh Government's Supporting People Programme** gives more information on the Programme.

## Welsh Government funding allocations relevant to homelessness (for all ages)

	Homelessness Prevention Grant Allocations	Extra money Allocations		Actual Expenditure <sup>5</sup>	Supporting People Programme Allocations	Actual Expenditure	Total Actual Spend
		Rough Sleeping Additional In-year money	Housing Act Transitional Funding				
2014-15	£6.4m	–	–	£6.5m	£134.4m	£134.3m	£140.8m
2015-16	£6.4m	–	£6m	£11.8m	£124.4m	£124m	£135.8m
2016-17	£5.9m	–	£3m	£10.6m	£124.5m	£125.1m	£135.7m
2017-18	£5.9m	£2.6m	£2.8m	£8.8m	£123.6m	£123.6m	£132.4m
2018-19	£9.9m <sup>6</sup>	–	£6m <sup>7</sup>	£14.7m	£124.4m	£124.4m	£139.1m

Source: Welsh Government figures (rounded to one decimal point)

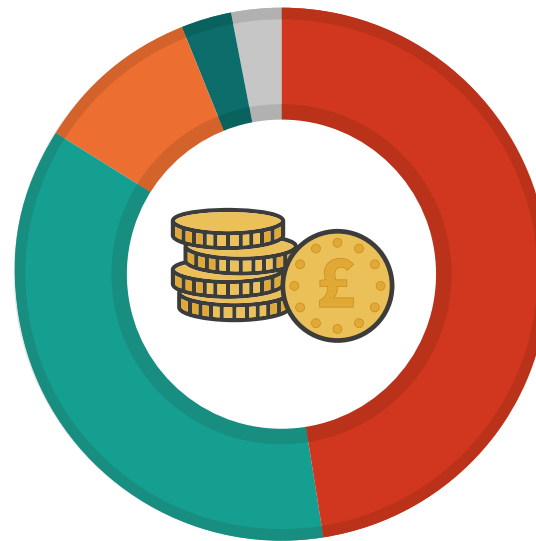
### ■ FOOTNOTES

- 5 Additional money in 2014-15 and 2016-17 came from underspending in other areas.
- 6 Including £1.05 million from the Welsh Government's Funding Flexibility pilot. The pilot brought together funding from several grants to give councils flexibility on how to spend the money. From 2019-20, homelessness prevention funding will be part of a new Housing Support Grant. The new grant includes homelessness prevention, Supporting People and Rent Smart Wales.
- 7 In 2018-19, the Housing Act Transitional Funding became part of the Revenue Support Grant to councils. Councils use the Grant to pay for many different services and may spend more or less than the £6 million allocation on implementing the Housing Act.

The Welsh Government plans to spend an extra £10 million in 2019-20 on youth homelessness. Plans will include:

- training and awareness raising work for those working directly with young people;
- youth homelessness co-ordinators in each local authority area;
- new housing support through an innovation fund; and
- improved access to information on available support.

The chart shows how the money will be spent.



- £4.8m Welsh Government Innovation Fund
- £3.7m Youth Support Grant to councils
- £1.0m Additional funding to St Davids Day Fund for care leavers
- £0.25m Welsh Government communications work
- £0.25m Welsh Government improving access to information for young people

Source: Welsh Government figures

Our report on **How Local Government Manages Demand – Homelessness, 2017** showed that the amount of money councils chose to spend on homelessness fell from 2009-10 to 2015-16.

**Our data tool** shows homelessness budgets for each council area. In 2017-18, council homelessness budgets across Wales totalled £15.7 million (£5 per head of the population). Budgets rose to £20.4 million (£7 per head) in 2018-19. We do not have information on budgets before 2017. Council spending can differ considerably from the money they set out in their budgets.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

## | Opportunities for improvement in the Welsh Government's approach

### Understanding the scale of youth homelessness and the people affected

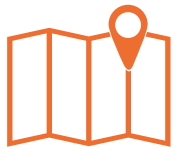


It is difficult to get accurate information on 'hidden homeless' people who are staying with friends or sleeping rough and do not ask councils for help. Also, the information councils send to the Welsh Government only shows the number of people who ask them for help and what happens to them. It does not show the total number of young people in Wales who are homeless or likely to become homeless.

The Welsh Government knows that some people are more likely to become homeless including care leavers, people leaving prison, and people who are lesbian, bi-sexual, gay or transgender. The Welsh Government is working with relevant organisations to understand the needs of these people.

The Welsh Government asked the [Wales Centre for Public Policy](#) to research youth homelessness prevention and is planning work to improve the way public services identify young people at risk. Part of the new approach will include adapting the [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework](#) to identify and support young people at risk of becoming homeless. The current Framework aims to support young people to progress in education and training. The Welsh Government is also funding training to help education professionals to identify young people at risk of becoming homeless through its Youth Support Grant in 2019-20.

## Understanding what services exist and gaps



Young people who are homeless or likely to become homeless often need help in different parts of their lives. How much help young people get and how good that help is changes a lot from one local area to another. We heard that some young people are being sent back and forth around different agencies and having to join up services for themselves. Some organisations told us it is difficult to get help for young people who have a mental health problem.

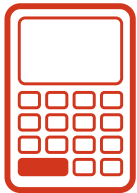
Some of the accommodation or services are not what young people actually want or are in places where they do not want to go. For instance, some do not want to go to homeless hostels because they worry there will be drugs and other things they are trying to get away from at the hostel.

Organisations are also concerned that a lack of appropriate support makes young people more vulnerable to exploitation, such as taking up offers of a room in exchange for sex.

The Welsh Government is improving the information it has on services to prevent youth homelessness including future research on housing options for young people. It commissioned research from the Wales Centre for Public Policy to inform policy and funding decisions. The Wales Centre for Public Policy has published separate research specifically mapping youth homelessness services for care leavers in Wales. The Welsh Government could improve its understanding by building on this information to see exactly where the gaps in services exist – both in youth homelessness services and in wider services to help young people with other issues they may have. It also needs to understand whether young people are using available services and if not – why not?

The Welsh Government's £4.8 million Innovation Fund is aimed at increasing housing and support options for young people at risk of being homeless or who are currently homeless. The [Welsh Government's funding guidance](#) says that organisations applying for the funding should work together to avoid duplicating services that already exist.

## Understanding Costs



The National Assembly's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee **inquiry on rough sleeping** found that the Welsh Government should work out how much it will cost councils to do their legal duties to help people who are homeless or might become homeless and to carry out the Rough Sleeping Action Plan.

Organisations told us that the Welsh Government has under-estimated the costs of ending youth homelessness.

## Joining up policy making



Young homeless people often have problems in other parts of their lives that contribute to their homelessness. Similarly, there are often signs in different areas of a young person's life that they may be at risk of losing their home. Identifying and supporting young homeless people and those at risk of homelessness requires different services to work together in a way they are not yet doing.

Organisations raised concerns about how well different parts of the Welsh Government share information with each other and connect different areas of work. The National Assembly's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee raised a similar concern.

## Working out who does what



The Welsh Government has committed to preventing youth homelessness and said it is a key priority for Government. But organisations told us that the Welsh Government guidance documents are not clear about who should do what. We also heard that beyond council housing departments, other council departments and other organisations often do not recognise their role in ending homelessness.

The Wales Centre for Public Policy said the Welsh Government should write a national strategy to end youth homelessness and work with other organisations to carry it out. The Welsh Government plans to use the Centre's research to develop its approach but has not confirmed whether it will produce a strategy.

The National Assembly's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee said that the Rough Sleeping Action Plan is not clear about what the Welsh Government wants to see or who needs to help. The Action Plan aims to help people of all ages including young people. Preventing rough sleeping is an important part of preventing youth homelessness.



## Learning from and improving delivery on the ground



There is not enough information on how well services are working together, what difference they are making or what young people think of them. Our report on the Supporting People Programme found that the information councils collect does not give a clear picture of what the programme is achieving. The Wales Centre for Public Policy also said that the Welsh Government should get more and better evidence about whether approaches to youth homelessness are working.

The Welsh Government could also do more to understand what impact its strategy and guidance documents have had. The Welsh Government has not done a review to see how well its Ten-Year Homelessness Plan worked. The Welsh Government could not give us any examples of where its Positive Pathway to Adulthood guidance has been used or whether it has improved support for young people. Welsh Government officials did not know whether health boards are using its Health Standards for Homeless and Vulnerable Groups.

## Providing leadership



The Welsh Government has given councils, health boards and their partners flexibility to decide what they want to do locally. When done well, flexibility to adapt to local circumstances should mean young people get different but equally good support. However, we found that young people get different access to and quality of services depending on where they live. The Wales Centre for Public Policy called the differences 'untenable'.

We heard that local services are working well together in areas where partnerships are strong, but this is not the case across Wales. Some organisations told us their successes were 'despite' rather than because of the system they work in.

The Wales Centre for Public Policy found that some councils are not even complying with their legal duty to share information, do joint assessments of 16 and 17-year-olds and plan pathways for care leavers. The Welsh Government looks at council information to see what they are doing to end youth homelessness. But Welsh Government officials do not actively make sure councils or other organisations are working to end youth homelessness, or that councils comply with the law. The Welsh Government thinks local council committees should be making sure councils meet their legal duties.

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