2025 Annual Conference
Bigger Conversations – Mental Health and Homelessness
29th November 2019, 10am – 4.30pm
Ramada Plaza, Ellice Way, Wrexham, LL13 7YH

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Summary

The 2025 2019 annual conference brought people together across organisations and systems in North Wales with a common goal of addressing homelessness through poor mental health.

The key themes for the event were to examine:

- How partners can work together to stop losing their homes as a result of poor mental health.
- How we can create connections to address the void that exists across current systems, policy and infrastructure.
- How can we better engage the private rented sector, recognising that not everyone at risk of homelessness and in need of support lives in social housing?

Key issues from conference discussions:

- There was a strong message from all discussions that to tackle homelessness through poor mental health we need to find a way to end silo working and continue to break down

organisational barriers, and that the work of 2025 is crucial to achieving this.
- There is a vital need for services to shift towards being more people focused and centred around the needs of the individual – the challenge must be framed from the perspective of the person.
- Funding of services continues to be a real issue – conditions of funding mean that staff retention remains a challenge and people continue to fall through the gaps.

Presentations included:

- **Dr Karen Sankey**, CEO, Community Care Collaborative – An overview of the model being developed in Wrexham.
- **Jon Sparkes**, Chief Executive, Crisis – Looking at the work of Crisis and the Welsh Government Homelessness Action Group.
- **Stuart Ropke**, Chief Executive, CHC Wales – Examining how organisations can work in partnership with public services to end evictions into homelessness.
- **Martin Cooil** Conwy Council Housing Solutions Lead – An overview of the range of approaches and progress being by the Council's homelessness team in response to the Regional Homelessness Strategy.
- **Enid Roberts**, Chair, Regional Collaborative Committee - Overview of progress and role revisions of the Regional Collaborative Committee.
- **Phil Forbes**, Development Manager, Supported Housing, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board - Overview of service redesign via the three Local Implementation Teams focusing on better access, avoiding crisis and increasing partnerships.

Key themes and discussion points from presentations:

- People experiencing homelessness are more likely to die in their mid-40s and more likely to take their own lives.
- 58% of social landlords cite poor mental health as the primary underlying cause behind the issues leading to most evictions.
- Vital to stop discharging people directly from public services into homelessness – linking to the seven ways to prevent rough sleeping set out in the Homelessness Action Group Report.
- Housing associations in Wales are setting the ambition for ending evictions into homelessness.

Reflections from the audience

Facilitated by Ken Perry – Director Do-Well (UK) Ltd and Visiting Industrial Fellow Wrexham Glyndwr University

Panel:
- Jon Sparkes, Chief Executive, Crisis
- Clare Budden, Group Chief Executive, ClwydAlyn and Chair of 2025
- Stuart Ropke, Chief Executive, CHC Wales
- Tracy Hague, Housing Options and Allocations Lead, Wrexham County Borough Council
- Elliw Llŷr, Anglesey County Council

Key Q&A topics:

- Is homelessness really a political priority?

- Barriers to procuring services

- Housing allowance and benefits

- Are 'affordable' rents truly affordable?

- Role of the private sector – access, quality, security, longevity, crisis prevention

- Impact of the revision of guidelines around priority need status

Workshop sessions feedback

1. **How can we end homelessness in Wales, led by Clare Budden**
   The Homelessness Action Group is coming up with recommendations that Welsh Government should take to prevent and end homelessness in Wales. This session aimed to shape the recommendations by sharing what is working well and reflecting on what needs to change.

Background to workshop discussion:

Consultation undertaken by the action group of people with experience of homelessness found that the top three issues are:

- Importance of compassion and removing barriers

- Housing

- Flexibility

Workshop discussion points:

- Feedback and reflections from the top three priorities identified from two consultations

- Are there any issues that should be added?

Key themes from group discussions:

- The high turnover of support workers is a key issue – lack of consistency in service.

- Services are stretched, referrals too slow.

- Model needs changing to be more person centred – built on individual needs.

- Funding timescales – conditions of funding often lead to lack of time/ consistency as well as lack of support for staff. Short term funding also means it can be difficult to retain staff.

- Inconsistency of information sharing particularly across local authority boundaries.

- People will lived experience of homelessness need to be better utilised to help tackle the issue.

- Transition accommodation – better coordination and planning needed – funding needs to be available to 'hold' accommodation for people released from hospital.

- When support services stop should be based on the person, not the statistics.

- Currently the approach is based on the person fitting into the service – it needs to be the other way around.

- Rough sleepers should be a priority group.

- Need for more financial support and awareness raising work on how to sustain tenancies.

- Remove prioritisation and intentionality – top up funding for individuals, quality of referrals needs to improve and waiting time for services.

- Funding needed for health and wellbeing support.

- More effective referral routes – quicker pick up and triage into services.

- The challenges won't be addressed unless we can end silo working and better join up services and support.

2. **Preventative work and early identification – Whose responsibility is it? Led by Sarah Schofield, Adra, and Phil Forbes, BCUHB**

Whose responsibility is it?
The workshop examined the role and challenges of each organisation in preventative work and early identification of mental health issues affecting housing:

Workshop questions:

1. What role does my organisation play?
2. What challenges does my organisation face / what challenge do staff as practitioners face?
3. How can we overcome these challenges?
4. Who is missing?
5. Any other key issues to record?

Workshop discussion key themes:

- Important to recognise that everyone has their own roles.

- Offer alternative accommodation to meet individual needs.

- Health and housing need to work together – through a regional approach.

- Challenges – KPIs around things like voids and income create pressures for staff and can lead to burn out and stress – we need to be less target driven.

- Funding frameworks – often not enough funding or staffing levels to deliver services.

- Need more political lobbying to secure funding that is focussed on social value.

- Person centred approach – Vital to better understand people, listen to what they need and want and make sure they receive the right referrals – building trust is crucial.

- Age restrictions on services are too rigid – too many people are falling through the gaps.

- Lack of compassion – belief by some that homelessness in a choice. Training is needed for frontline workers around mental health.

- Treatment of rough sleepers needs to change – enforcement and eviction as punishment doesn't work.

- Power of narrative – need for stronger communication with human interest stories to bring the issues to life.

- Other issues that need to be addressed – Lack of single person affordable accommodation, more quality affordable housing, RSLs must not make people homeless and need to look for other solutions, increase availability of crisis support.

- Funding – is it more about profit in the sector than 'social conscience'? – need a shift in culture to refocus on tenants, not landlords.

Appendix A

Organisations represented at the conference:

Bangor University
Adra
Isle of Anglesley Council
Arts Connection - Cyswllt Celf
ASNEW
Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd
AVOW
BCUHB
British Red Cross
Cartrefi Conwy
CAIS Ltd
ClwydAlyn
Community Care Collaborative CIC
Community Housing Cymru
Conwy County Council
CRISIS
Dafydd Hardy
Denbighshire County Council
Digartref Cyf
Do Well Limited
DVSC
Elemental
Flintshire County Council

FLVC
Forfutures
Groundwork North Wales
Healthy Homes Healthy People (Warm Wales)
HMP Berwyn
Hough Bellis Communications
Housing Justice Cymru
North Wales Housing Association
North Wales Fire & Rescue Service
Public Health Wales
Seed Enterprises CIC
Shelter Cymru
St Giles Trust
TGP Cymru
The National ottery Community Fund
The Wallich
Vale of Clwyd Mind
Wales & West HA
Wales Audit Office
Wrexham Glyndwr University
Wrexham County Borough Council
Wrexham GP Cluster