

Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Prisons in Wales, HC 101

Wednesday 17 April 2024

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 17 April 2024.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Stephen Crabb (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Virginia Crosbie; Ruth Jones; Ben Lake; Beth Winter.

Questions 190 - 250

Witnesses

I: Katie Dalton, Director, Cymorth Cymru; and Chloe Marshall, Nacro Wales Operations Manager, Nacro.

II: Stephanie Rogers-Lewis, Operational Manager for Housing Need, Cardiff Council; Tracy Hague, Head of Service (Housing), Wrexham County Borough Council; and Liza Ridge, Housing Options and Allocations Lead, Wrexham County Borough Council.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Cardiff Council](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Katie Dalton and Chloe Marshall.

Q190 **Chair:** Bore da, good morning. Welcome to this session of the Welsh Affairs Committee where we are continuing our inquiry looking at prisons in Wales. The theme of this morning's evidence session is housing and housing support for prisoners and we have two panels. In the first panel we are joined by Chloe Marshall, who is the Wales Operations Manager for Nacro, and by Katie Dalton, who is the Director of Cymorth Cymru. Perhaps we can start the discussion by asking you both to outline very briefly how your agencies support prisoners in Wales. Chloe Marshall, perhaps you could go first.

Chloe Marshall: Of course. We deliver several contracts in Wales for the MoJ. We have the CAS-2 contract, which is accommodation for individuals who might be on home curfew, detention curfew, or who might be on bail and at risk of recall. We also have the Dynamic Framework contract, which supports individuals both in the community and in custody who have accommodation needs. That might be to find accommodation or it might be to help them maintain and sustain their accommodation.

In the wider landscape, through other funding, mostly housing support grants, we have some supported accommodation for people leaving prison. We deliver some floating support in B&Bs to try to help people maintain that and we also deliver some support in temporary accommodation, which is 24/7 support, again just to try to help people maintain it and thrive for the next steps into more sustained accommodation.

Q191 **Chair:** Thank you very much. How many prisoners in Wales roughly would your agency support in this area?

Chloe Marshall: Through the Dynamic Framework we only work in Berwyn because we only have the north Wales contract. The CAS-2 operates mostly in south Wales and I do not manage that. I have some information about that and I will do my best to respond, and I can come back to you with anything I am not sure about.

Chair: Brilliant. Thank you very much. Katie Dalton, please.

Katie Dalton: Cymorth Cymru is the representative body for providers of homelessness and housing support services in Wales, so we are not a direct service provider. We have over 80 members across the length and breadth of Wales of varying sizes and specialisms, many of whom will support people with a history of offending through more generic services, but some of our members will also provide specific services to people who have experienced the criminal justice system.

Q192 **Chair:** Thank you. Not all your members would necessarily be in the space of supporting prisoners; is that right?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Katie Dalton: Most would not be specialists, but it would surprise me if not all of them had experience supporting people who had had contact with the criminal justice system.

Q193 **Chair:** In terms of what has been going on in the residential housing sector across Wales generally in recent years, would you say that the job of you and your members in supporting prisoners with housing needs is becoming harder?

Katie Dalton: Absolutely. In a recent survey of our members last year, I think over 80% said that demand for housing support and homelessness services had increased and over 90% had said the complexity of support needs, so that is talking about the general homelessness population. What people are seeing is people with a lot of co-occurring complex needs, so that might be offending coupled with mental health challenges, substance use issues, often trauma from childhood. I think the complexity of that is growing.

Certainly, we have seen a huge demand for homelessness and housing support services in Wales. We have record numbers in temporary accommodation, over 11,000 people currently in temporary accommodation based on the latest Welsh Government statistics. I think the last one published showed around 1,500 were being moved into temporary accommodation in January and only about 700 were being moved on to settled accommodation. You can quite quickly do the maths and you see huge numbers going into temporary accommodation presenting as homeless and not enough settled accommodation being available for people to move on. We are seeing people stuck in temporary accommodation for potentially up to two years or even more for some people, often in temporary accommodation that is not suitable for their needs with no access to cooking and laundry facilities. For single people that is challenging enough; for people with families it is even more difficult to cope with that. Local authorities are on their knees. There is just not enough accommodation out there.

I would say that temporary accommodation is maxed out in most areas so there isn't any choice. Local authorities will do their best to find somewhere for someone and that often means that for people coming out of prison who have maybe sought help for their mental health and substance use inside prison and managed to make progress in their recovery, sometimes the options that are available to them when they come out in terms of temporary accommodation will not support that recovery. I have certainly spoken to people on the streets who said that they have deliberately not gone into temporary accommodation because they have worked hard to recover from their addiction and they do not want to put that at risk. They know other people within those settings will be struggling with addiction and be active users.

I should mention that one of the things that my organisation has done over the last nine months is spoken to over 300 people with lived experience of homelessness as part of the Welsh Government's legislative



HOUSE OF COMMONS

reform agenda. That included two visits to prison and two visits to Probation Services as well.

Chair: That is really helpful. Chloe Marshall, would you broadly concur with what Katie has just shared?

Chloe Marshall: Absolutely. I think for people leaving prison, while there is a strong commitment from the local authority to make sure that there is some temporary accommodation available, they do not know where they are going to be. For an area that is very dispersed, their support network could be two hours away from where they are placed but they cannot make arrangements to get any script or anything like that sorted prior to release. There is this window on release that creates huge challenges for people.

Q194 **Chair:** In terms of what work has been done by colleagues in England, would you say there are any significant differences in the experience at the moment when it comes to housing of prisoners in Wales compared to prisoners in England?

Chloe Marshall: We are very fortunate in Wales that there is a real push to make sure that people are not leaving prison with nowhere to go. While temporary accommodation is not ideal, at least there is an option of not being on the streets. I think we are very fortunate in that respect.

Katie Dalton: My colleagues operating in England would say they face very similar challenges, and I think that the commitment from the Welsh Government in terms of keeping everyone in and providing accommodation for as many people as possible is certainly different in tone and commitment to England. I think that the development of the National Pathway for Homelessness for people leaving prison, which was developed about nine years ago, certainly has not solved all the problems, but it is an example of devolved and non-devolved organisations trying to work together to find solutions that match up both at the time of the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda and the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to try to understand how we can better co-ordinate all those different responsibilities from devolved and non-devolved to try to make it work.

The reality of implementation of that has not been as successful as people would have liked for obvious reasons, but I think that the intent was there to work together. The Women's Justice Blueprint is another example of where Welsh Government officials have worked together with UK Government officials on the justice side on a shared aim to reduce the offending and reduce the harm affecting women in Wales who have interacted with or been at risk of the criminal justice system.

I think the broader housing environment is similar in challenges to England, but there are some differences in Wales, certainly in intent, even if that does not necessarily follow through to perfect outcomes for people.



Chair: That is very helpful and a great way to start the discussion.

Q195 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** I have a general question. Where do most prison leavers in Wales spend their first night once they are released from custody?

Chloe Marshall: Generally, in temporary accommodation, maybe in B&B accommodation, but as I was saying, they do not necessarily know where that temporary accommodation is going to be because the local authority is so stretched. They do not have an awful lot of stock, so they are working day to day. While there is a commitment from everybody to support people on release to have somewhere to go, while the application for assistance is being done in custody and people are working in custody together with the local authority, it is still what is available on the day. As I mentioned, that is a huge challenge for individuals who have been released. It is at that point, once they are released, when a lot of the community organisations can look at what solutions are available.

Q196 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** When we talk about release day, some of the examples I have been given are that in some of the communications with the people they are being released to, the temporary accommodation, the prisons are releasing them early. Is that something you see happening in Berwyn?

Chloe Marshall: Yes. Particularly now with the early release scheme the challenges there have definitely compounded. What we have seen on a couple of occasions where people have been released early is that we have not been able to necessarily work together as organisations to come up with a cohesive plan to support that individual to thrive because there are lots of challenges, potentially physical challenges. It would be nice to have occupational health really understand what the best placement would be for that individual and to plan for it, but we do not necessarily always get that time.

Katie Dalton: Certainly, my recollection during Covid was that some of the early release happened at a time when such demand was on homelessness services anyway. We went from a situation where certain groups of people were not entitled to temporary accommodation prepandemic to that “everyone in” approach in order to deal with the infection control issues, and then some of the early releases happening put additional pressure on to local authorities. The difficulty was the lack of appropriate information and the time to deal with this.

I agree that many coming out into temporary accommodation, some people I spoke to within prison and probation, were not even given accommodation but were given a tent and a sleeping bag. The desperation that they have to make a fresh start—many of them I visited and spoke to within the prison recognised that they had done wrong, had done their time, felt that they had reached the point where they had done their time and wanted a fresh start, and were desperate to have a home because the home is the foundation of everything else. If you do not



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have a home, then it is difficult to do all sorts of things in life, including getting employment, managing to turn up to appointments, whether that is health, your script.

Some people I spoke to told me that they were placed in a B&B and they had to walk 90 minutes every day to get their methadone script. A 90-minute walk every single day. How do we expect people to stay on recovery and be able to do that? I would suggest that is not necessarily about the local authority choosing to place someone 90 minutes' walk away, it is about the lack of accommodation and probably the lack of information and planning that was given there. Another person said that they were placed out of county and they had to take two buses just to get to their probation appointments. We heard from other people that you miss three probation appointments and you get recalled, so the phrase I heard most often in the prison was, "We are being set up to fail. We have done our time and we want a fresh start." A home is essential and lots of people had no confidence that they would have one when they left prison.

Q197 Tonia Antoniazzi: That is key, isn't it, Katie? Your organisation represents over 80 homelessness, housing and support service providers in Wales. How do they work well together? There are such a huge number of organisations, and we see it as well with some of our constituents. Is this hindering the journey of the person being released from prison or is it a good thing?

Katie Dalton: I think it is probably important to distinguish between the number of charities operating out in the community, which are varied. I think it is important to have a diversity of support providers. You will know that some are specialists in VAWDASV, some are specialists in young people, as well as some of the more generic providers.

In terms of the prison setting, something that I have heard is that there are lots of different organisations operating in the space but not enough clarity and co-ordination. If organisations are saying they are unsure who is responsible for what or who might be the single point of contact, what must it feel like for a prisoner in there? I would suggest that there are lots of organisations that bring excellent skills and expertise to the table, so it does not necessarily mean getting rid of them, but it is about better co-ordination and clarity.

Q198 Tonia Antoniazzi: High-risk sex offenders, for example, single men going out into the community, into specialist housing, are usually stuck in specialist housing and cannot be moved on and, therefore, create a blockage in the system because no private tenant is going to want them going into this accommodation. They end up bed-blocking and they cannot move on from their situation. The other thing I was told and the other thing that I wanted to ask was that they cannot evict them either due to the new Renting Homes (Wales) Act. There is a blockage in the system here. How does that get unblocked and how do these people get the support services that they need? You have spoken about this; these



HOUSE OF COMMONS

people are getting stuck in a system that is not helping them. They have come from a structured environment in prison to being stuck in a system, bored, and getting back into their old routine again. What must change, basically? What do we have to do?

Katie Dalton: Housing supply, and that is not unique to prisoners. When you think about the stigma that people in prison face and the judgments that are placed and how that feeds into things such as allocations of housing and whether people are prepared to take them on, if you do not have enough housing for the general population, then I would say that prisoners are probably bottom of the list for many landlords. I think that goes to social housing. We have not built enough social housing for the last 40 years. The Welsh Government have got their 20,000 social housing commitment for this Senedd term, which is a great start but we are playing catch-up.

In the private rented sector, the major issue has been local housing allowance rates. Research done by the Bevan Foundation showed that about 2% of properties in Wales were available at local housing allowance rates. Again, that is a challenge to the whole population and certainly people experiencing homelessness who my members support, and then if you look at the specific group of people leaving prison, who are probably going to be much more disadvantaged when it comes to allocating that, so building more social housing, addressing the issues with the welfare system. We are pleased that local housing allowance rates are going to be increased as of this month. We hope we see a shift in the number of properties that are available to people who are limited by local housing allowance rates.

I would also say that the shared accommodation rate, which is the rate awarded to people under 35, means that they are priced out of much of the private rented sector. I think it is a bigger housing supply issue, but the multi-agency support that goes in to help people make those steps is critical as well.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Yes, because it is £70 a week at the moment. What is it going to?

Katie Dalton: It is different in different local authority areas, but it is supposed to represent 30% of the available private rented properties—it is the lower 30th percentile—and it hasn't. It has represented in recent times 1%, so you can imagine the impossibility. That is part of the reason why we still have 11,000 people in temporary accommodation, because people physically have not been able to afford private rented because of the housing benefit limits.

Q199 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Talking about all the different stakeholders, on HMPPS's side alone you have an accommodation pathway co-ordinator, a strategic housing adviser, specialist housing adviser and the prison resettlement team who are going to be involved in varying degrees with the process. Are there too many actors, Chloe?



Chloe Marshall: I think it shows a real commitment to supporting people leaving prison. We must welcome that. I also think there is a real commitment to co-ordinating that approach. A lot of that happens. The governor at the prison works hard to bring us all together. There are working groups and roundtables that go on that work hard to try to bring people together. There is a commitment. As Katie mentioned, there is a wide net with lots of people in it and hopefully that means there are fewer places to slip through it.

The staff turnover challenge is something we have been thinking a little bit about in terms of this question, because while there are lots of processes that bring everybody together, every time you have staff turnover then you must retrain and get that person back into that process to understand all the different people. I think that has created some challenges for us.

Q200 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Is there a high staff turnover?

Chloe Marshall: We have certainly seen a high staff turnover in Nacro in Wales over the last couple of years, and it is very challenging in the work that we are doing. It has huge strain on staff in terms of emotional wellbeing and the salaries are not there, because there is not a lot of money for us to pay people. We have seen a higher staff turnover than what we were used to in previous years for sure.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Do you have anything to add, Katie?

Katie Dalton: Just what I said before about clarity and co-ordination. Many people have commented that there are many players in this field and that there is a lack of clarity in co-ordination and communication. For me it is about the quality of information and the timeliness of information. The prisoner pathway, accommodation pathway, sets out certain times that have been agreed both with devolved and non-devolved agencies around doing assessment of housing need, of creating resettlement plans, of then communicating with the local authority where that prisoner has a local connection, so that the local authority can then act on trying to prevent or secure accommodation.

If we were able to get the quality of information and the timeliness of information sorted, local authorities would be able to act on that much more quickly. Often it is incomplete information. It often comes too late. Prisoners have said to me, "We have done this assessment. I have told them what my situation is. It has been sent off and then I get to the week of release and nothing has happened and I do not have anything", so where is it going wrong in that system?

Q201 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** The strategic housing advisers, then, that were put in place, are they effective or not?

Katie Dalton: I cannot comment on specific roles, I am afraid.

Chair: I am conscious of time so we are going to have to pick up the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

pace a little bit. Ben Lake, show us how it is done.

Q202 **Ben Lake:** Thank you very much to you both for attending this morning. Recent inspections suggest that different prisons are faring better than others in terms of ensuring suitable post-release accommodation for prisoner leavers. Why do you think some prisons do better than others? I will start with Katie.

Katie Dalton: Coming here today is with the caveat that I work in the homelessness sector and I am not an expert in all things criminal justice, but I think there are several factors that probably contribute to this. I think it is the length of sentences and the turnover within prisons. We know that in some prisons there is greater turnover, greater inflow and outflow. From what I understand that is very difficult to manage. If you look at the prisoner accommodation pathway, there are certain time lengths in there and for some of the people on shorter term sentences or on remand they will be in there for such a short period of time that it will not fit into that prisoner pathway. That comes into it. Where people are on longer sentences there is an ability to plan and manage that more effectively.

I think that whether people are local to the area in which they are placed is important. It might be that a local authority that is where a prisoner is based has much better relationships and communication, potentially opportunities to go into the estate, build those relationships with staff and people within the prison estate, but where someone is placed in Bridgend but is in a different part of Wales, then that can be challenging for obvious reasons. That plays into it.

I also think it is the complexity of support needs. I mentioned earlier the co-occurring needs of people. For some people there are decades' worth of trauma that have led them to be where they are. A lot of that has not been unpicked. A lot of people have self-medicated and become addicted to substances. It is the ability to support people and work through that.

On the services and the join-up that is available on the other side when people go out of prison and into the community and how joined up that is, I cannot speak specifically to the different prisons but I think those are some of the issues that for me play a part in the differences in consistency.

Q203 **Ben Lake:** Chloe, do you have anything to add? Specifically, do you find that local authorities in which you do have prisons are better when it comes to ensuring that any leavers who have a fixed address in their patch secure proper and appropriate accommodation post-release?

Chloe Marshall: Yes. We only operate across north Wales so I cannot speak for south Wales, so it is not a very good sample size for me to provide. The only point I would come back to is what Katie has mentioned, that where we have housing services in Wrexham, it is much easier for our staff to go in and have a chat and meet with people and maybe do interviews prior to release for people to access that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

accommodation. Where they are a long way away, South Gwynedd, a two-hour or a three-hour drive, then it is much more challenging. There will be that natural join-up. Broader than that I could not comment.

Q204 Ben Lake: That is very useful. Thank you. Katie, if I can turn to you very briefly, that point that Chloe makes and you also made it in your answer about the local authorities that are further away from prisons, do you think there is a need to look again at the way in which support services based in those home areas, for want of a better way of putting it, engage with prisoners before they are released?

Katie Dalton: Interestingly enough, there has been a recently established Welsh Government group looking at this in particular. The Committee might be aware that there is a programme of legislative reform happening in Wales. A White Paper was published before Christmas on ending homelessness, which we are very supportive of. All stakeholders are supportive of doing something to ensure that fewer prisoners are homeless when they come out of prison, but I think everyone recognises that it is a challenging area, so a group has been set up by the Welsh Government to explore this. They are looking at reciprocal arrangements, at how we ensure that if you are in a local authority that is not where a prison is based you get the right quality of information. Does the local authority where the prison is based take on more of that? There will be questions about the past-year funding and all the rest of it, so it is a very live discussion.

Q205 Beth Winter: Bore da. Good morning. Picking up on Katie's point earlier about people having a home, because it is not about having a house, it is much more, so as well as the issues around supply of housing we have also had evidence about the quality of the accommodation in terms of it being squalid. It is not just about the location but about the quality internally. What is your experience in Cymorth regarding quality of accommodation and who has the authority or duty to monitor that quality of housing before ex-offenders access it?

Katie Dalton: I believe that there are Welsh Government regulations and standards around the quality of temporary accommodation, and local authorities should ensure that any temporary accommodation they provide in line with their legal duties reaches that standard. Probably the challenge that we have experienced since the pandemic is that the numbers that we are talking about—I mentioned earlier over 11,000 people in temporary accommodation in Wales—far exceeds the provision that we have. It has been challenging for local authorities to provide temporary accommodation full stop, and to ensure that standards are being met.

There are some providers of accommodation who will not take people who are known to them, who maybe have a reputation and an offending history and, therefore, the options that are available to that person become less and less. I am very clear that people should be afforded dignity. They should be afforded standards regardless of what their



HOUSE OF COMMONS

background is, and then it is important that that is delivered. It is unacceptable where that accommodation does not meet those standards.

Q206 **Beth Winter:** Is it the experience of the providers that you support that the accommodation is generally unsuitable, not just temporary accommodation? There are some that are unfurnished. I can remember, as I used to work in housing, lots of people would come out of prison and they would be in a flat with absolutely nothing in there. You cannot expect someone to retain the tenancy where they do not even have a sofa to sit on.

Katie Dalton: Generally, where our members are involved they are strong advocates on behalf of the people that they support. They will play a role in saying, "This is not acceptable" and then advocating to the local authority to provide an alternative. Where people do not have that support worker, that independent third sector support worker to advocate on their behalf, then they often feel at a loss. I think people feel that this is all they are entitled to. They have reached a point where they accept they do not deserve anything. I spoke to one guy on probation whose universal credit had been messed up and for three weeks he did not get his universal credit and had to walk around in his prison tracksuit. He said, "Oh, I thought this was just part of the punishment." I think there is something about the level of confidence and ability to advocate on behalf of yourself when you have been through an institution and the importance of advocates in the third sector to advocate for you.

I would say that most of the accommodation that my members work with people in is of a decent standard, but that would vary considerably. I agree, there are real issues in terms of having furniture and being able to access funds to have some of those. As you said, a home is not just a roof over your head. It is all those things.

One issue that came up when I was speaking to both men in the prison and people in probation is a loss of belongings when they are taken into prison. Not only were people losing their homes, and sometimes that was because it was a long-term sentence and they could not hold on, sometimes it was short sentences but they were being politely encouraged by their landlord to give up their property and sometimes being quite forceful in that, but also losing belongings. One guy said, "I lost all my belongings and that included the only photo I had of my dead child. I now have nothing and I do not know how I am supposed to exit prison and start afresh when I have lost one of the things that is most dear to me." Another man I spoke to said, "I grabbed my mum's ashes and a suitcase and that is all I could carry with me and nothing else". This is one of the things that the Welsh Government are looking at in the White Paper, not only about retention of accommodation where possible but also retention of belongings. People are human beings and all those things are important to us all when we think about if we had to move house or if we had to have a change in circumstances. It is to the person



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and the dignity that we afford them. I think those things are also important.

Q207 **Beth Winter:** Thank you. Chloe, in terms of the Ministry of Justice ensuring the CAS-2 accommodation is suitable, how does that work?

Chloe Marshall: They are very on it. We have our own structure where we have checks and balances and a whole team that supports that. They come out once a month to check.

Beth Winter: Is it suitable?

Chloe Marshall: Yes, they do quite a lot, but can I just speak to your point about the home? That is interesting when we talk about the temporary accommodation bit. A lot of the individuals that we are supporting are going through an awful lot at that moment. Sometimes it is easy for them to not necessarily comply with the conditions that are part of their B&B, so if they stay away and they go to see somebody because it is a long way away, then it is incredibly temporary and they can lose that accommodation so easily.

We talked before about the Renting Homes (Wales) Act and how difficult that is. At least that gave people a level of security. The temporary accommodation is not just temporary because it is a room with very little else, it is very temporary because they do not have any real rights to stay there.

Q208 **Beth Winter:** Chloe, in terms of the evidence we have had, there seem to be more people leaving prison in Wales, becoming homeless, than in England. That is the data that we have been shown so far. Is that your experience?

Chloe Marshall: No. When I speak to my colleagues across the border—

Beth Winter: It seems to be a more common issue for prison leavers, sorry, to be specific.

Chloe Marshall: No, that is not my experience but I am not sure if some of that information was from before the legislation changed. Was it?

Beth Winter: Do you have any information you could send us? Maybe some data.

Chloe Marshall: I can have a look.

Q209 **Beth Winter:** That would be great. Katie, finally, sorry, obviously supply of housing and quality are issues, but what else can be done to reduce the numbers of ex-offenders leaving prison and becoming homeless? I know it is a huge question. There is a lack of transition, isn't there, in terms of the support people get in prison and then they are just left to go out, so that is definitely an issue. Should people go into prison in the first place? There is a whole—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Katie Dalton: Absolutely. I think where possible we should avoid short sentences, because I think of the disruption that that causes to people in terms of losing home, losing jobs, disruption to children, and it is particularly a concern for women. For me that would be one of the key things that we can do, to have more community-based provision where people are able to retain their home and carry out community orders or that sort of thing and it would be my preference in terms of short sentences.

It is that early identification on reception as to people's housing status wherever possible and being able to retain that housing. That might mean accessing housing benefit where it has not been claimed before. It might be about having someone who liaises with landlords to try to convince them to hold on to that. It might be about accessing discretionary housing payments to top up rent if the sentence goes slightly beyond the housing benefit time that people are allowed to have that. It is the quality of information that goes to local authorities and timeliness of information.

The co-ordination and the capacity are important. At the moment I think local authorities are so overwhelmed by the scale of homelessness in Wales that it is just difficult to cope with.

I have mentioned welfare. Let's keep an eye on local housing allowance rates and see whether that makes a difference, but also the under-35 rate is just unacceptable. On the multi-agency point, I think it is about people who have mental health support and substance use support in prison being able to access that immediately on release, so getting rid of Friday releases because that is a nightmare for people and being able to help people connect with those services.

I heard some really nice examples from speaking to some people that Dyfodol in south Wales is able to go into prison and sort out the meds for people so that they have their medication for 10 days post-release. That is something that I spoke to someone about, so an example of good practice, multi-agency working that has meant that that person gets that support and that medication that they need for 10 days. I heard another story from speaking to men in prison on probation about peers meeting them on exit and helping to take them to the local council, people who had been through that themselves and understood how challenging it was, who could empathise with the men and take them to places they needed to be. I think that connection is important.

Beth Winter: I am conscious of the time with other people having questions. Thank you.

Q210 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** I want to pick up on what you said there, Katie, about the short sentences. Basically, if you have reoffended, then you will have to go back in. You are out of the accommodation system and that all starts again. Do you have data around that?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Katie Dalton: I am afraid I do not have data, but it is certainly—

Tonia Antoniazzi: Would it exist?

Katie Dalton: I am not sure. The Ministry of Justice must have data on that, but it is certainly something I hear about, that cycle of recall and often recall because people do not have accommodation. There are examples of people who have refused temporary accommodation because they do not think it is going to help with their recovery and then being recalled because they do not have accommodation and that is a condition of their licence. There are people missing appointments because they do not have a home and that ends up in recall. There are people not being able to get released because they do not have accommodation. It is a vicious cycle that people get into.

Q211 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** One of the other questions that I have is the Committee has raised its concerns about the level of support available for prison leavers once they conclude their time in CAS-3 accommodation. Why do some local authorities have the CAS-3 funding and some do not? Is there a reason for that?

Chloe Marshall: I do not know the answer, sorry.

Katie Dalton: I cannot speak to that, sorry.

Q212 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** The other thing I wanted to know was when the housing and homeless support for prison leavers in Wales currently ends. Do we know when that ends and are there any gaps that we need to look at?

Chloe Marshall: The CAS-2 accommodation can last for up to six months, but I think it is about the joined-upness thereafter. There are other services out there. There are lots of other services around and it is how people work together. For some people they might not need support thereafter. It might have been more focused around accommodation, but for other people who do need support it is about how they link into the support providers that are available, maybe schemes funded through HSG and other things. We have gateways for a lot of the local authorities, so people can be referred into a gateway to find the most appropriate provider. That ensures that people are not falling through the gaps because they are referred to somewhere that does not have capacity and then they get put on a waiting list and it does not happen. If they do not have capacity, then the gateways know where the capacity lies and can ensure the right support. It is about how they all work together.

Katie Dalton: Yes, there may well be limits to when the criminal justice support ends, but what we have in Wales is the housing support grant, which is a successor to the Supporting People programme. The ringfence around supporting people in England was disbanded several years ago and services have been decimated in England. We have maintained the ringfence in Wales and it is now called the housing support grant. There are housing-related support services that can support people after they



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have stopped receiving support specifically within the criminal justice system. Those are not time limited. If people need support to maintain their tenancy to avoid that risk of homelessness, then people should be able to get that support through the local authority. That is what the majority of my members deliver through.

Q213 Tonia Antoniazzi: Following on from there, then, Cymorth Cymru is representing both Pobl and Shelter Cymru on delivering the Prison Link service. How effective is their engagement with key partners such as local authority housing teams and the Department for Work and Pensions?

Katie Dalton: I think Chloe had a conversation with Shelter Cymru. I spoke to Pobl the other day, and they have handed back the contract for Prison Link Cymru. From their perspective it did not align with their core business plan and strategy. I think they recognised that they are not specialists at working in prisons and did not think that they wanted to continue to operate in that space. Again, feedback from speaking to Pobl and others is that there are lots of people working in that space without a clear sense of who is co-ordinating, if anyone at all. It is difficult to get people into the estate if you are not part of the criminal justice system, so if you are third sector like Pobl or others it is difficult to get people in when you have turnover of staff, again really difficult to get the new staff in. To get high-quality information from the various people is quite challenging as well.

Their main reason for handing back that contract is that it does not fit in with their broad provision, but there are challenges that are experienced when working in the secure estate as a third sector organisation that are difficult. When you are committed to delivering the best possible outcomes for people you support, it is frustrating when you come up against challenges.

Chloe Marshall: One of the things that Shelter highlighted as a big challenge was where people are in custody over the border. If somebody is in Berwyn and they must try to find accommodation or support people who live in England, the whole devolved housing aspect creates challenges for them in the work that they are doing. It is two very different processes that they must understand, learn and be aware of.

Q214 Ruth Jones: Following on, you have both painted a very realistic and accurate picture that chimes with what we have heard when we went to HMP Cardiff, for instance. It is a very bleak picture and that is just for prisoners in Wales. I am interested in women. Obviously, offenders are housed in English prisons. How does that fit in with the situation? Chloe, you are dealing with HMP Berwyn. What happens about the women coming back?

Chloe Marshall: When I was speaking to colleagues in CAS-2 they were telling me that 17% of their housing is used for women coming back into Wales, which is higher than any other place that they deliver in England. They were also telling me that they have a unit where the women have



their children staying with them as well, which I think is lovely. That is one of the big things that we tend to see for whatever reason more with women, that there is a desire to get a safe place for them and their children. A lot of temporary accommodation, such as bed and breakfast where there are lots of other people, we have on a couple of occasions found that people have decided to give custody of their children to their partner or parents because they do not feel that it is a very safe space for their children to be.

We have some support services where we are supporting women who are coming out of custody. We are supporting them in their temporary accommodation through our floating support, through the HSG that Katie mentioned, and we have seen instances where they have been placed in temporary accommodation and then been recalled four times because they are not feeling very safe in the temporary accommodation, they tell us. It is really challenging for a lot of women coming out.

Katie Dalton: My point about short sentences is even more important when it comes to women and the impact on children and their caring responsibilities as well. Because we do not have a women's prison in Wales, and I am certainly not advocating for one, it is so much more challenging for women. There are some committed organisations working in that space who care deeply about the work that they do supporting women, who understand the high levels of trauma and abuse that often women in the criminal justice system have experienced. The need to be trauma informed is something that I would say should be across all services but particularly for women in the criminal justice system, ensuring that that trauma-informed support is there for them when they are released from prison and that they feel safe, so coming back to home and some of the comments Chloe made about the types of accommodation that women are placed in. Safety has often not been there for many of those women throughout their lives, so being released from prison to somewhere that feels unsafe is problematic and can lead to them falling into addiction and more engagement with the criminal justice system.

I would like to see fewer women going into prison and staying closer to home and more community solutions being developed with women's centres, with those specialist women's organisations operating in that field, because the histories are so complex behind many of those women.

Ruth Jones: Thank you both very much. I will hand you back to the Chair now.

Chair: That brings us to the end of this first part of today's session so, Chloe Marshall from Nacro and Katie Dalton from Cymorth Cymru, thank you both for the frank, insightful and very helpful information that you have shared with us. We are going to suspend the sitting now for one minute while we transition to our second panel.

Examination of witnesses



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Witnesses: Stephanie Rogers-Lewis, Tracy Hague, and Liza Ridge.

Q215 Chair: Good morning and welcome back to this session of the Welsh Affairs Committee where we are looking at prisons in Wales and specifically the challenge of housing prisoners. For this second panel we are joined in the Committee room by Stephanie Rogers-Lewis, who is Housing Need Manager at Cardiff City Council. Welcome. We are joined virtually from Wrexham County Borough Council by Tracy Hague, who is Head of Service for Housing, and Lisa Ridge, who is Housing Options and Allocations Lead. Thank you to all three of you for making time for the Committee this morning. I will start this part of the discussion by asking from both local authority perspectives if you could help us understand how you see the challenges for prison leavers in your local authority areas. Perhaps Stephanie from Cardiff could go first.

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Yes, of course. I suppose it is quite vast. Within Cardiff ourselves we employ a Prison Link officer whose role is vital for us to understand the needs of those prisoners. What we are seeing at the moment is duplication with some of the work in prisons. We find delays with receiving information, some of the applications perhaps not being fully completed, so it provides difficulties in us being able to source suitable accommodation in a timely manner. The whole purpose of the Prison Link officer is so that we can have that early intervention, so we can fully understand a person's needs before their release, and so we are able to secure accommodation in readiness for that. Within Cardiff in terms of our accommodation we have a diverse range of accommodation options, but without that early planning it is impossible for us to create that individual pathway plan.

In terms of some of the early release work that is going on at the moment, while it is completely understood the reasons behind it, it adds an additional pressure. As we heard in the first session, homeless services are under huge demand already and any increase on that sets us back even further. We see the numbers coming through are incredibly high. Early release for April alone was 16 on top of the 39 already due to be released, so it makes it very difficult for homeless services to provide suitable accommodation for every one of those when we get information sometimes a day before release.

Q216 Chair: When the Ministry of Justice considers these early release schemes do they liaise with you at the council to help anticipate the additional need that will create?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Not that I am aware of. The first early release was October, so we saw very small numbers then. With this very recent change from March, April, as I said the numbers were incredibly high, 12 one month, six and then 16. Certainly, from the information I have we were not contacted to discuss the impact that would have.

Q217 Chair: Can you give a sense of annual numbers of prisoners that Cardiff Council would have to help support?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Obviously, we were looking at the 2019 data initially, so 2019-20 we were looking at 288 prison leavers and then last financial year it was 328. The increase there feels quite small, but when you think about it in the bigger picture of homelessness as well, as I said any demand is huge. Where we are seeing that early release data that is our real concern in terms of us being able to plan. When we are considering accommodation for the prison release for this month or our general demand for the next five years, without us being able to have a clear picture of what that might look like it makes it very difficult for us to be able to do so.

Q218 **Chair:** When some of us visited HMP Cardiff recently I recall a prisoner telling us about being handed a tent as there was no accommodation to go to. How often does that happen in Cardiff?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: As a local authority we have never provided tents. It is not something that we would do. We are aware of other support services or other charities that have felt that that has been a support option for those leaving prison. I do not have the data on it but we are aware that it did happen and we did try to encourage charities or any sectors that were providing that to encourage those individuals to contact us in the day. It is that day contact. For some of the ones that we are aware of in Cardiff, unfortunately when they were looking at their release plan a lot of them for whatever reason stated that they had other accommodation options available to them, so as a homeless service we were not aware of those people likely to present. Again, it comes back to what that early conversation is like with that prisoner so that we can effectively plan. In terms of tents, as an authority we try to publicise quite heavily that that was not the option that we felt was safe and suitable and for people to encourage those to access the support services that we could offer.

Chair: The inference from what you are saying is that the council is actively discouraging the giving of tents to prisoners.

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Yes. Like I said, it is about that conversation with us. I suppose the concern as well is that it is not always visible. Yes, of course, there are a small cohort within Cardiff city centre perhaps that would have pitched their tents, but the greater concern is that those would choose to move away from the city centre and are very excluded, very unknown, and it makes it difficult for us to be able to support from an outreach or multidisciplinary perspective.

Q219 **Chair:** Thank you very much. That is very helpful. Perhaps we can move now to Wrexham County Borough Council, if I can ask the same questions to Tracy Hague and Liza Ridge. Perhaps one of you could answer those questions and give us a sense of the overall numbers of prisoners that you as a county borough council are supporting each year and what you see as some of the principal challenges at this time.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tracy Hague: I echo some of the comments made by my colleague in Cardiff. In terms of numbers for Wrexham, in the last financial year we had 120 requests for assistance and temporary accommodation and of those we had repeat presentations from 21 individuals, so they are not all new cases. Sometimes there are individuals who come through as a result of recall or reoffending so we did not have 120 new individuals; we had 119 in effect and 21 of those were repeats.

We do have an issue of stock within the county borough in terms of secure accommodation and for use for temporary accommodation and especially for single persons. Although 42% of our waiting list is demand for single person accommodation, that includes from our general waiting list, not just from those who are leaving the secure estate. We do have an issue with bricks and mortar, not so much with support services. We do have support services that we commission that can go in to support those who are leaving prison to try to assist but again we cannot always guarantee that those who are released from prison turn up to present, so we may plan for someone to come to us and they do not turn up. You cannot always guarantee that when we do the assessments through the prisoner pathway that those individuals will turn up.

Again, sometimes we will go through the pathway with an individual and we are notified that they do not need accommodation and that may fall down at the last minute and again they do present to us, so we then must try to source suitable accommodation for individuals sometimes on the day of release. That can cause a difficulty for us, especially when we have to adhere to licence conditions. There may be an exclusion area that we cannot place an individual in a certain area of the city so we must look at that as well, and their support networks. It is a combination of a lot of difficulties that we do encounter when someone comes through the door.

Q220 **Chair:** Thank you. That is helpful. That question that I asked Stephanie at Cardiff Council about prisoners being given tents to sleep in on the first night outside of the gate, does that happen in Wrexham?

Tracy Hague: Indeed not. No.

Q221 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Are there any gaps in support for prison leavers in Wales as they move from the community accommodation services into settled accommodation and, if so, what are they? I will go to Wrexham as you are on the screen.

Tracy Hague: The main issue for us in terms of support services is the engagement of the individual. Sometimes the individual when they move into more secure accommodation feels that they no longer need that support. There is, I would suggest, quite a wait time for some in terms of mental health support. That can sometimes be a difficulty because the waiting times and the waiting list for mental health services is quite lengthy. Where we know that someone comes into temporary accommodation and they are supported, where we can we move that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

support with that person into more secure accommodation and they can take that support with them.

We have some control over that where we commission support services through our housing support grant, but we have no control where someone is gaining more support maybe through NHS services, for instance. We do not have any control over that. Where we can offer the support and where we commission the support services, the support follows the individual into secure accommodation.

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Much the same as Tracy has said, in Cardiff, and I am not sure if Wrexham do, we have the multidisciplinary team, which has helped to bridge that gap slightly, so working more with those individuals with complex and multiple needs. It is not prison leaver-specific but certainly that cohort would be eligible to access that support. In much the same way it is trying to keep that support continuous when someone does move on into something that is more settled.

We also have a Housing First scheme that is solely for prison leavers within Cardiff, which has proven successful but numbers are quite small in comparison. We have 12 people on the scheme at the moment; nine of those are accommodated and three are currently in custody that we are supporting to secure accommodation on release. With that, it is that early contact from that service while they are in custody and then that support continues while they are in that accommodation.

Again, much the same as Tracy has said, while the MDT does help to bridge the gap in particular around mental health and substance misuse, I think there probably is a fair way to go in terms of what those services look like and at what point they start to engage with those individuals.

Q222 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Stephanie, in your submission notes there is the issue of prison leavers advising their resettlement teams that they have arranged accommodation, when in fact that is not the case. What are the issues that might deter a homeless prisoner from identifying as homeless on release? What are the reasons behind it?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: This is more anecdotal than any evidence, if I am honest. I suppose they have concerns themselves about stating that they have somewhere else to go. They do not want to access homeless services and then find themselves on that day having no other option. I would not know the specifics as to why they feel that would be the better plan. It is also about the timing of when those questions were asked and how often they continue to be asked within that system.

As I said at the start, where there is duplication of work and different services involved at different levels, it is ensuring that someone has that robust conversation around housing, what that means and what the implications are for someone's information being given and that those checks are carried out. I am not suggesting that they are not. I do not know the process as to how that works from inside prison, but where



HOUSE OF COMMONS

someone suggests that they have an alternative option it is making sure that it is a viable option. Whether that is long term or short term, from a housing perspective it gives us something to work towards in terms of the support we can offer.

Q223 Tonia Antoniazzi: Somebody flagged with me that some local authorities do not have CAS-3 funding. Why would the local authority not have that funding?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: I do not know, if I am honest. It was my assumption that all did.

We have it in Cardiff and it works well. We differ to some other authorities in that we do not have CAS-3 specific accommodation. We work for the individual and we place based on their needs. The funding via CAS-3 is in place for that 84 days, but they remain in that accommodation and we continue that support because it would obviously be detrimental to look to move again after 84 days. I am not aware of how or why other authorities would not have that funding and utilise that.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Would Liza or Tracy know the answer to that? I am sorry, I am being nosy. I am like a dog with a bone now.

Tracy Hague: Wrexham is not part of the scheme because we could not deliver. We do not have the stock to be able to commit properties for the scheme for its duration because we have so many coming through the door.

Q224 Tonia Antoniazzi: Do you know how many local authorities are in the same situation as yourselves?

Tracy Hague: I am not sure, to be fair.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Okay. Thanks very much.

Q225 Ruth Jones: Thank you for attending today. It is so helpful to have the perspective of the local authorities here.

Obviously, both Wrexham and Cardiff have local prisons and you have to deal with people coming out of your local prisons, but I am interested to know if there is a difference with prisoners coming out from a different prison, say, in England. What about female prisoners? Obviously, they have to be housed in England so they are coming back to Wales. How do you deal with these different groups and are they treated differently?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: They are certainly not treated differently. As I have noted about the Prison Link officer, we have a base within HMP Cardiff now. That has allowed that role to build relationships with the staff and with the prisoners themselves, with the individuals. We would need to look at, in terms of development, where we are seeing numbers coming from prisons elsewhere and how we form that same relationship with those services and with those individuals.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

For females, as you mentioned, all ours—and we have looked at the data—are from Eastwood Park. The numbers are relatively low. Unfortunately, we are seeing that some are repeat ones who have been recalled, sadly.

It is more us having the base within Cardiff that has improved that relationship. However, as I say, they are certainly not treated any differently. We look at trying to form the same accommodation pathway plan for each individual regardless of the prison that they are coming from.

Ruth Jones: Thank you. Can I ask Wrexham, please?

Liza Ridge: It is similar to Cardiff. Our female prisoners are from HMP Styal and we have, obviously, HMP Altcourse in Liverpool, that we take prisoners from. It is the same thing, really. We try to engage very early with prisoners who are in England. Probation helps us with that. We have close links with probation officers in Wrexham locally and we are able to try to engage with that prisoner as soon as we are aware of when they are due for release.

It is difficult. It is not as easy as in Wales because we have that clear pathway for prisoners in Wales, but Wrexham does strive to be able to help prisoners in England when they are due for release in Wrexham.

Q226 **Ruth Jones:** You have mentioned, Stephanie, the link officer who is going into your local prison, but you cannot have a link officer with all the prisons, can you? How does it work in reality? How much notice do you get, say, of a female coming from England to you?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: It varies. That is one of the issues of development for the prison pathway as a whole, regardless of whether the prison is in Cardiff, within Wales, or within England. There are times where it is very last minute, and there are other cases where we get an earlier notification. As I say, sadly, early notifications are more for individuals who have already been within our services and have been recalled or have been given an additional sentence for something different, where we already have that involvement. For new prisoners, the notice can be very short. Then, as I say, regardless of which prison they are coming from, it leaves us very little time to work with that individual and the services involved.

Ruth Jones: I understand that. Wrexham, how do you find that?

Tracy Hague: We have an officer from the PSS, who is the link officer for female prisoners in Styal. That helps us in terms of notification. Having said that, the numbers are not great at all in terms of female prisoner release. In the last financial year we had a total of 18, and only 11 individuals. The numbers are not as great as for the male population. We tend to manage. It seems to be easier, and we find that female prisoners on release are easier to place.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q227 **Ruth Jones:** That is interesting. Are they coming back to home? I suppose that is the question. They are coming back?

Tracy Hague: Yes.

Ruth Jones: That means support networks are hopefully in place already, then.

Tracy Hague: Yes.

Ruth Jones: Okay. That makes sense. Thank you.

Q228 **Beth Winter:** Picking up on the previous section, consistency, co-ordination, joined-up approach and clarity are the words that kept being repeated, and how important they are. Unfortunately, that does not necessarily work.

We are interested in finding out what your relationship is with the third sector organisations and housing associations, but I am going to take it a little bit further and ask about your relationship with probation and the prison. If you are only getting notified on the day that somebody—it is about a holistic approach. Does that work? If not, why, and what needs to change? Did you want to go first, Stephanie?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: There are a lot of services involved, as we have all touched on, and as you mentioned in this morning's session, there is a lot of duplication. In terms of the prisoner engagement, they are potentially meeting with three or four different services or agencies, including ourselves as a local authority. We certainly need to look at how we can streamline that process a little bit and make sure that individuals are getting the same information—again, that consistency that you have mentioned—from that first day into custody, when we have four trusts involved and Probation.

The referral process for homeless applications, as I note, needs to be tighter. There are obviously times where we look at early release and I appreciate that some of those timeframes might be shorter. However, as a general pathway, in order for it to work and for us to give that individual the best opportunity of succeeding on release, it needs to be firmed up a little bit and have greater consistency.

Talking about our links with RSLs in terms of move-on accommodation, we work well with our cells in Cardiff. We manage a common housing waiting list. We have a few different schemes that they have been involved in. We have three managed accommodation sites, which are pivotal to the housing-led approach to homelessness that we are taking in Cardiff, and there are three housing association blocks of accommodation where Cardiff Council will go in and provide that support. To date there are 159 units, I believe, with 100% tenancy sustainment.

From temporary accommodation—which unfortunately is the greatest option, in terms of numbers coming from prison—they move on to more



HOUSE OF COMMONS

settled accommodation using our common housing waiting list. All housing associations agreed to our supported accommodation move-on pathway, which looks at providing a greater level of information to RSLs at the point of offer, a real, holistic look at someone's needs and support at that time, so that they were best placed to provide the best support and the best match to accommodation as well.

Q229 Beth Winter: Third sector organisations do a huge amount of work in terms of support. Have relationships—

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Yes, absolutely. As I say, we have the multidisciplinary team, which has a lot of those third sector organisations within it. We are looking at some mental health services, substance misuse and police/probation. They have all signed up to the same model of support that we are working towards and that therapeutic approach.

Outside of those as well, we do have good links in Cardiff. There is always room for development because the needs of people change all the time and numbers are continuing to increase. We are certainly not resting where we are, but I feel that we have good links with those.

Beth Winter: Thank you. Wrexham, your experience?

Tracy Hague: Very similar, I would say. We have a nominations process with our RSL partners and that works very well for us. In terms of supported accommodation, we will nominate through the gateway and identify more appropriate accommodation that is suitable, and that works well.

We would be looking to work with prisoners at an earlier stage. It would probably be better if we could follow a similar MAPPA process for all prisoners because 66 days is not long enough for anyone to be in, and for everyone on the multi-agency team to go in and assess the needs of that person who is coming out of the secure estate. I know the Welsh Government's White Paper is looking at us going in earlier on, arguably when a prisoner is first taken into custody, and looking then at the needs so that we can future plan for when that individual is released.

Q230 Beth Winter: Excuse my ignorance. Do you get notified of every prisoner's release, regardless of whether they are homeless? There must be lots and lots of people who are leaving prison who are falling through the net. Well, I know there are. You do not get notified of every single—

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: No.

Q231 Beth Winter: Okay. For those who present, are you always able to provide some form of accommodation? Do they have to go on a waiting list, even for temporary accommodation, or are they asked to stay with a relative for a few days because of the demand on your housing stock?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: In Cardiff we would have conversations around any other safe and suitable alternative options. Again, I think this



comes from early intervention from housing on that first day of entry into prison. Is that realistic? Look at what the accommodation is. Some are coming out with greater expectations and while we would love to meet those expectations, unfortunately that is simply not the case at the moment. Yes, we have conversations around any other options in the short term so that we can work towards a more suitable accommodation offer.

Q232 Beth Winter: Would you say that a lot of people who are leaving prison are offered a roof over their heads rather than a home, which is what we talked about previously, because of the demand? This is not a criticism.

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Within Cardiff we have rapidly increased our temporary accommodation—we have over 1,000 units of accommodation for single people—but we are still in a position where we are having to rely on some of that emergency-type provision in the shared space, which is far from ideal but is essential to meet that demand. Yes, some certainly would be offered that setting. Where we have greater notice and CAS-3 type placements, obviously they are offered more of our supported accommodation with a self-contained style model.

Beth Winter: Thank you.

Q233 Ruth Jones: We visited Cardiff Prison and were told by some of the prisoners that they choose not to go into hostel-type accommodation because of the drink, the drugs and things like that. They would almost prefer to be on the streets because at least they can control their environment more. Bearing in mind that it is local authority provision, what support would you need to make things better here? Hostels obviously are providing a need, but if there is so much of an issue within them, what would you need to make them better?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: It is difficult, isn't it? In terms of the accommodation stock that we have in Cardiff, I appreciate that we are dealing with the homeless cohort and some will obviously have substance misuse issues. Again, I think it is breaking down some of those barriers for individuals who perhaps are coming into services for the first time. That stereotypical view does not exist across all accommodation, or it certainly does not look like they would expect it to look. That is not me suggesting that they are coming into a home, as we have spoken about, but certainly a lot of our accommodation has high levels of support. There are a lot of wraparound services around the accommodation that can support those individuals.

I take on board that some may be coming out who have reduced their use themselves or have never been around that environment. We are constantly looking in Cardiff at what our accommodation can look like and what it needs to be: whether we need larger projects, smaller projects, projects away from the city, or projects where someone is unable to drink or use substances. We are constantly reviewing based on feedback from individuals and the needs that we are seeing coming through.



Q234 Ruth Jones: I suppose these are not the type of people who are going to give you feedback in your questionnaires and things. They will walk away rather than get back involved with drink and drugs. Certainly, that was the experience we were told about. In Wrexham, we were told that people do not even have a lock on their bedroom door and things like that. They cannot find secure accommodation. Is that a situation in Wrexham and what would you do to make it better?

Tracy Hague: Ideally, we need more stock and we need more single-person accommodation. We need the bricks and mortar so that we are providing a home rather than, as you put it, a roof over someone's head. The reality of it is that we do not have that stock so we are trying as best we can to provide the safest and most suitable accommodation that we have available at the time.

We know that in the stock we have, if there are multiple rooms in the accommodation, they do have locks on the doors so that they can secure themselves in their accommodation. We do provide support. Even if we have the use of hotel accommodation, for instance, we provide support officers daily to feed back any issues that individuals may have. Obviously, everyone has the right to appeal. If we get it wrong and we have put someone in a placement that is not suitable for them, we can then look for an alternative and move them on.

We have processes in place. That does not stop someone feeling that they cannot approach us upon release. I do not know how we get around that to convince someone that we are there to try to help and support them as best we can. Basically, we need additional resources.

Q235 Ruth Jones: Absolutely. I understand that. You may deal with private rented accommodation as well. How do you deal with landlords who are providing substandard accommodation? Ex-offenders are likely to end up there as well.

Tracy Hague: In terms of temporary accommodation, we do not use substandard accommodation at all. We would not engage a landlord who was not registered with Rent Smart Wales, or where we had not visited the accommodation that we were using in the first instance to ensure that the accommodation was to a standard that we felt met the benchmark. We have turned landlords away in the past when we have visited accommodation and it was not up to standard. We have not taken them on.

We have a local lettings agency in Wrexham, which is run by the local authority, whereby we work with landlords in the private sector and we manage their properties for them. We go in and manage the properties and the tenancies, but we initially go in and make sure that the property is up to standard before we engage with that landlord.

Q236 Ruth Jones: Stephanie, if you have a landlord who has accommodation that is not up to scratch—and it may have been lovely at the beginning—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

how do you deal with them later on? What regulations and standards can you hold them to account with?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: After we have placed somebody in there, you mean, and they have let the standards slip?

Ruth Jones: Yes.

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Much the same as Wrexham, we have a dedicated private rented sector team and we have properties under the Welsh Government leasing scheme as well. Within that, we have a property conditions assessor. Within that relationship for the PRS team, they are the link between us and the landlord, the landlord and the client, and us and the client.

There are checks of the properties. We work closely with our shared regulatory services. If there are concerns around accommodation that have not been addressed despite a request to the landlord, that is when we work with our partners as shared regulatory services to get involved and inspect the property. We want to support the landlord and not take it to the level where perhaps there needs to be action taken against them, but certainly if that is the route it is going, that is where we will have to take it. In terms of the individual who is placed in there, of course, if the property becomes unsuitable for any reason then we would look for an alternative option for them.

Q237 **Ruth Jones:** You are confident that you have enough powers to be able to do that now?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Yes.

Q238 **Chair:** May I ask a question to both sets of witnesses? Have you seen a reduction in the overall number of properties available for private rental in your local authority areas in recent years? Wrexham, you are nodding. Perhaps you could answer first.

Tracy Hague: It is what I refer to as the "Rob and Ryan effect", because of the—

Chair: The what effect, sorry?

Tracy Hague: The Rob and Ryan effect, I refer to it as.

Ruth Jones: Right, okay. Wrexham football, yes.

Tracy Hague: The football club has been so successful that we find a lot of our private landlords are now moving away from offering properties into the private rented sector and are turning them into Airbnbs because they can get more money. Therefore, we have seen a huge decrease in the amount of private sector accommodation that we can utilise.

Chair: We have seen the same thing in Pembrokeshire without the Rob and Ryan effect. I am going to ask Stephanie from Cardiff. Have you seen



the same thing?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Yes, definitely. Not celebrity influence, I do not think. In terms of Airbnbs—we obviously have a huge student population in Cardiff as well—we sponsor the Cardiff Landlord Forum and we get to speak to landlords on a quarterly basis there, and it was, for some, the final straw. Perhaps they are a little bit older—accidental landlords, if you will—and it was just the thing to push them out of the market.

With the accommodation that we have, it is very difficult to get anything that is affordable. The increase in local housing allowance, on paper, looks like it will improve that. We saw at the start of the calendar year that the difference between our average rent in Cardiff and the LHA was about £170, which obviously is not affordable for anyone in receipt of benefit. We are now seeing that that is a shortfall of £50, which makes it more affordable. To caveat that, we have seen a lot of our landlords increase their rents based on the increase in LHA. It is something that we need to continue to monitor and see what impact it has.

Q239 **Chair:** Essentially, across Wales—whether specifically relating to prisoners or whether it is housing generally across the board—the scale of need has increased and the availability of stock has gone down significantly in the last five years.

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Yes. About prisoners specifically, as I have said, our Housing First model only works with private landlords. Obviously, that is very different. There is a huge amount of support that goes into it and there is a financial element.

Part of our role within the private rented sector team is to try to break down some of those barriers for the landlords that we have left, prisoners and the homeless population in general, and to break that stigma. A lot of individuals who are coming through do not need high levels of support. They are able to manage independently and have just found themselves at this difficult point. It is a continuous conversation for us to try to bring forward some of those real-life homeless case studies, if you will, so that landlords have a better understanding of who these individuals are. For a lot of them, they are the people who they have sadly had to give notice to because they have chosen to reduce their portfolio or change their portfolio in some way.

Q240 **Chair:** I will bring in Ben Lake in a moment. Using some of the language of the mythology around prisoners and housing, do prisoners, when they get released, go to the front or the back of the queue?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Everyone is assessed based on their needs. Certainly, we have a particular pathway for it. Our aim would be, under that prison pathway, to make sure that every individual who comes through that route is offered safe and suitable accommodation. As I have said, we are competing against a huge demand so we have to look at



HOUSE OF COMMONS

individual needs, and sometimes we are in a position where we are having to make quite difficult decisions around accommodation. A “queue” perhaps is not the best way to term it. It is having a look at the needs of every individual who requires our assistance.

Q241 **Chair:** Thank you. To Liza and Tracy at Wrexham, a similar question. I know Stephanie says that it is not a queue as such but there is a very long list of people hoping and wanting to get housing support through the local authority. When prisoners are released from Berwyn or come back to their Wrexham home area, how do you go about prioritising their needs above other residents who have not been through the criminal justice system?

Liza Ridge: In terms of temporary accommodation, they do get priority on release from prison if they have no other—

Chair: They do get priority.

Liza Ridge: Yes, they do get priority on release from prison if they need temporary accommodation. That accommodation is sourced as quickly as possible through the pathway for them, whatever that looks like on the day of release. As mentioned earlier by Cardiff, we do explore options where it is appropriate to do so, where they can go and stay with friends or family for a period of time and then come to us for temporary accommodation if that comes to an end.

For general move-on accommodation under our allocation waiting list, they will sit in the same band as every other homeless presentation: families, couples, an older person. They will join the waiting list for move-on accommodation like everybody else in that band, but can stay in their temporary accommodation for as long as they need to be ready for move-on. Move-on is slow for single-person accommodation, though, and I think that is across Wales in every area. We do not have the stock to meet the demand that we have coming through the door for housing options assistance. Move-on accommodation for a single person can be 18 months, two years or three years, depending on when we get the vacancies within the borough.

Chair: That is difficult. Thank you very much.

Q242 **Ben Lake:** Stephanie, I would like to ask you first, coming from a local authority that has a prison within its jurisdiction. I would like to understand a bit more about what happens if an individual is released from prison who, technically speaking, is registered or has a fixed address elsewhere in Wales—or the UK, for that matter—but presents themselves to you very last minute, in need of accommodation. How would Cardiff City Council go about trying to accommodate that need?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: In the first instance, obviously we would like to avoid that. That comes back to our involvement as early as possible so that we can assess that person’s eligibility for homeless assistance in Cardiff, checking that local connection. Where someone does turn up



HOUSE OF COMMONS

homeless on the day, if you will, often we are seeing prisoners being released that have high or complex needs and, therefore, there are times where, depending on their circumstances, we can accommodate them while we do the referral to their area of local connection.

As I say, the ideal would be that there is a plan for that person in their area of local connection, but outside of that, there are occasions where we are able to provide accommodation pending the return to their area of local connection.

Q243 **Ben Lake:** Thank you. Does it happen often?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: No, not on release from prison. Cardiff is quite a popular city for someone to present as homeless to, but we are not seeing huge numbers of prison release coming from it. Where we do see it, perhaps, is with those who have shared that they have elsewhere to stay on release from prison and that breaks down and then they look to present there. However, on day of release, we do not see a huge number of prisoners presenting who do not have a local connection to Cardiff.

Q244 **Ben Lake:** In those circumstances, where somebody previously had a place to stay elsewhere but that falls through and they present themselves to you, is it the case that you then liaise with their home local authority to secure something more long term for them?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Yes, it would be, generally speaking. The only thing to consider with that is that a lot of the single person homeless cohort can be quite transient. It is very difficult sometimes to be able to establish where their area of local connection is. We do have a waiver process within Cardiff where we can consider individual needs in those circumstances, where they have moved around a fair amount and perhaps do not have any solid roots or support in a particular area.

Q245 **Ben Lake:** Thank you. I would like to turn to Wrexham and ask a similar question. Is it something that happens often for you? When it does occur, do you have a similar procedure in terms of liaising with their home local authority, for want of a better way of putting it?

Liza Ridge: Yes, it is very similar to Cardiff. We do not have a high number of prisoner release—or anybody—coming to Wrexham who does not have that local connection. Where that happens, and it does happen on occasion, we will try to liaise with their local connection area. I would suggest that in most cases we would accommodate on a reasonable step if they need accommodation before we can reconnect them under our powers, and then give them travel warrants and so on to go to their connection area and present to that local authority. There are not huge numbers at all.

Q246 **Ben Lake:** Great. Just on that front, do you feel as though there is a good way and good contact between local authorities, not just in Wales but also within the UK, on these matters? Do you feel you have good



contact with, say, Ceredigion, so that if somebody did present themselves to you having been released from Berwyn, you could get in touch with Ceredigion?

Liza Ridge: Yes. If somebody presents to Wrexham who has a local connection elsewhere and we contact that local authority, nine times out of 10 they are familiar with the case anyway. For example, about two or three years ago we had a lady present from Scotland who did not want to be in Scotland anymore. When we contacted the local authority in Scotland, they were fully aware of her. We reconnected her back to that area as soon as possible, but accommodated her as an interim in Wrexham until we could sort out travel back to that local area. It does work well between local authorities, I would say.

Q247 **Ben Lake:** Fantastic, thank you. This is my final question. Clearly, from recent inspections, we know that there are still a significant number of prisoners who are released into homelessness on the day of their release. From your experiences and your expertise, is there anything that you would like to see either UK Government or Welsh Government do, whether that is a change of policy or new resource, which would help reduce the number of individuals who are released into homelessness in future?

Liza Ridge: Yes. It is a difficult one, isn't it? In some circumstances, prisoners who come out of prison have accommodation but they are not allowed to return to it because of licence conditions. That makes it very difficult for us to try to move them on. If somebody is an owner-occupier, for example—

Tracy Hague: We have one now.

Liza Ridge: Yes, we have a case now where a prisoner coming out of prison is an owner-occupier in the borough, and licence conditions are preventing him from returning to his home. The responsibility falls on the local authority under the homelessness legislation to accommodate this person and help them try to move on to alternative accommodation where his licence conditions are not broken.

Q248 **Ben Lake:** Yes. Thank you. That is very helpful. Stephanie, the same question to you. If you were able to draw up a wish list of any changes to policy or certain resources that would help reduce the number of individuals released into homelessness, would you have any thoughts on that?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Yes. As Katie touched on in this morning's session, some of those shorter sentences feel quite difficult to manage. I am not saying that would prevent release into homeless services, but it certainly seems to set us back in terms of the progress that we might have made with that individual.

Of course, stock will always be something that we would be looking for. To do that, there needs to be funding. Some of our schemes, as I have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

touched on, have very positive and high success rates, but being able to expand those—whether it is the Housing First model or the managed accommodation model—without stock availability and funding is unfortunately not something that we are able to do at this time.

Ben Lake: Thank you, and thank you to all three of you for your answers.

Q249 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Have either of your local authorities invested in these almost pod-like emergency accommodation units?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: The modular build type things? Is that what you are referring to, Chair?

Chair: Yes. Charities in west Wales have some that they use as emergency overnight accommodation. I am not sure whether that includes prison leavers, but certainly people who have found themselves being turfed out on the street for whatever reason. They are tube-like, very small pods.

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: No, not that particular model. In Cardiff we are utilising modular builds more now. Some of that has been family provision, but within our plans going forward it is something that we plan on doing more of. It is relatively quick. I am not saying it is quick at all, but it is quicker than building new provision.

Chair: Better than a tent, right?

Stephanie Rogers-Lewis: Well, absolutely.

Q250 **Chair:** Liza, in Wrexham are those structures a potential part of a complex solution?

Liza Ridge: We have looked into it in the past but we do not have the land or the space to be able to accommodate the modular homes or pods. That is a barrier for us in Wrexham.

Chair: Okay. Thank you to all three of you, and to our first panel as well. It was a very helpful session looking at obviously a very big and complicated challenge as part of our inquiry into prisons in Wales. Thank you very much. Thank you to colleagues, and we will bring this session to a close.