



# The Impact of Intentional Homelessness Decisions on Welsh Households' Lives

**Shelter Cymru, Welsh Government New Ideas Fund research (2011)**

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<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Context of the study .....	12
Intentional homelessness in Wales .....	13
The provision of support and assistance for intentionally homeless households in Wales .....	14
The 'Scottish model' .....	14
The support needs of intentionally homeless households .....	17
The aim of the current study .....	18
<b>Method</b> .....	<b>19</b>
The steering group .....	19
Literature and good practice review .....	19
Service provider and local authority in-depth interviews .....	19
Interviews with Intentionally homeless households .....	20
<b>Results</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Introduction .....	21
The accommodation pathways and support needs of intentionally homeless households .....	21
A young person (under 25) chaotic/support issues pathway .....	22
Entrenched chaotic/support issues pathway .....	25
Dependent children/support issues pathway .....	25
One off crisis/no support issues pathway .....	26
Intentional homelessness – structure or agency .....	26
The impact of intentional homeless decisions on the lives of households .....	27
Reduced housing options resulting in prolonged periods of homelessness .....	28
Adverse effects of being assessed as intentionally homeless and subsequent homelessness .....	32
Deterioration of unmet support needs that led to homelessness .....	34
A cycle of poverty and repeat homelessness .....	37
The especially damaging impact of intentional homelessness decisions for young people .....	38
The positives and negatives of the current legislation .....	42
The wider impacts to other services as a result of intentional homelessness decisions .....	44
The accuracy of the term 'intentionally homeless' .....	45
Solutions to intentional homelessness and overcoming barriers .....	47
Changes to intentional homelessness legislation, policy and practice .....	47
The private rented sector .....	47
Flexibility of housing options and support for intentionally homeless households .....	48
Reframing 'intentional homelessness' .....	49
The Prevention of Intentional homelessness .....	50
Education, communication and the early identification of 'at risk' households .....	50
Assisting intentionally homeless households to achieve sustainable housing outcomes after homelessness crisis .....	53
Barriers to preventing intentional homelessness and supporting households after crisis .....	54
<b>Recommendations and conclusion</b> .....	<b>56</b>
Decisions .....	57
Appropriate support .....	58
Structure .....	58
The private rented sector .....	58
Prevention .....	60
<b>Appendix 1</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>Appendix 4</b> .....	<b>80</b>

# Executive summary

## Introduction

This study aimed to examine the impact of being assessed as intentionally homeless (IH) on households in Wales. IH is one of the statutory homelessness tests that establish what kind of duty is owed to a household presenting as homeless. The legal definition of IH is complex: broadly speaking, it aims to limit individuals' rights to accommodation where their behaviour has been deemed to have deliberately caused the loss of accommodation which was reasonable to continue occupying.

Through a combination of interviews with households found IH and service providers we sought to define the extent and nature of the impacts of IH decisions and to make recommendations aimed at ensuring sustainable outcomes for homeless households.

We interviewed 45 households found IH in 17 local authorities (LAs) across Wales, capturing a wide demographic and geographical spread. We also interviewed 28 key staff in statutory and voluntary services in Wales and Scotland.

## Pathways through intentional homelessness

We found three main pathways that IH households take into and out of homelessness:

i] a **young person (under 25) chaotic/support issues** pathway, characterised by a number of moves through unstable accommodation. Individuals were most likely to have been found IH due to offences related to misuse of accommodation prior to a prison stay, non-payment of rent or anti-social behaviour. The support needs of these individuals centred round problems with substance misuse, mental health problems (primarily depression and anxiety) and offending behaviour. Some were able to go on from temporary accommodation to be housed through a housing association, private rented sector (PRS) accommodation or in a temporary hostel with support, where individuals are able to stay for a period of time while acquiring independent living skills. A proportion had yet to secure accommodation and was either sofa surfing or street homeless.

ii] an **entrenched chaotic/support issues** pathway, also characterised by numerous moves through unstable accommodation. Reasons for IH include anti-social behaviour, non-payment of rent and misuse of previous tenancy. Individuals in this pathway were distinguished by a high incidence of rough sleeping and repeat homelessness over several years. Their support needs were long-standing and had not been addressed. Some participants had since secured stable

housing via a housing association, while others were in supported housing or in a temporary hostel where they did receive some support. Very few had accessed the PRS and a substantial number had yet to secure any accommodation and continued to sofa surf or sleep rough.

iii] a **dependent children/support needs** pathway, defined as households where there are dependent children present but the family exhibit support needs that could affect their ability to maintain a tenancy. Reasons for the IH decision were mainly to do with rent arrears or abandonment of properties deemed suitable, and support needs included guidance with money management and independent living. Some of the sample also reported issues with depression and anxiety. This sample was less likely to exhibit anti-social behavioural issues or substance abuse. Some had since secured stable social housing or were in the PRS or supported housing. However, a substantial number had yet to secure any accommodation at the time of interview and were residing in guesthouses or staying apart from their dependents until their housing crisis resolves.

It is likely that there is an additional pathway: iv] a **one off crisis/no support issues** pathway. We believe those who fall into this category would be a small minority and due to the low numbers in the current study we have not discussed pathway iv in great detail. However, we acknowledge that pathway iv IH may increase in coming years as both tenants and homeowners face increasing rent/mortgage affordability issues in the current economic climate.

## Analysis of the impact of IH decisions on the lives of households

i] **Reduced housing options resulting in prolonged periods of homelessness:** being assessed as IH can dramatically reduce the chances of a household securing stable accommodation in both the short and long term, having to resort primarily to the PRS. This is difficult for many due to the affordability of the sector, problems providing deposits/bonds and stigmatisation of the IH decision. When accessing the PRS, IH households are vulnerable to accepting poor standards.

ii] **Adverse effects of being assessed as IH and subsequent homelessness:** Many IH households report deterioration in their personal relationships and increased social exclusion. IH decisions can lead to pressure on friends and family who accommodate the household during the period of housing crisis. Being assessed as IH can interfere with education, training and employment opportunities.

iii] **Deterioration of unmet support needs that led to homelessness:** A number of households assessed as IH suffer from some degree of depression and anxiety, which is likely to worsen following an IH decision. Substance misuse issues are also likely to worsen. Physical health is

likely to deteriorate especially if it leads to periods of rough sleeping. There are households that have mental health issues that have not been addressed and that are interfering with their ability to maintain tenancies.

iv] **A cycle of poverty and repeat homelessness:** Repeat homelessness results from a lack of affordable and accessible accommodation for IH households and a failure to address unmet support needs that interfere with the ability to secure and maintain a tenancy. Households assessed as IH can become trapped in the cycle that this creates.

v] **The especially damaging impact of IH decisions for children and young people:** Being assessed as IH can have a devastating impact on children and young people either as dependents of affected households or through being assessed as IH themselves. Dependents may have to relocate away from friends or have to change schools, and will be affected by the stress of family homelessness. Adults and children may worry that the family will be separated through Social Services involvement. Independent young people may lose tenancies due to a lack of life skills and/or unmet support needs: the IH decision is likely to negatively impact on their long-term future accommodation options and result in a cycle of repeat homelessness if not addressed.

## Views on legislation

Stakeholder opinion was divided, with some viewing IH as a fair and necessary aspect of the legislation that provided an incentive for tenants to behave and a way of rationing scarce resources. However, others – including some LA housing workers – believed IH is an unhelpful classification that does not necessarily lead to sustainable housing outcomes.

Many agreed that finding households IH has a financial impact on other services, in particular:

- Social services
- The criminal justice system, including probation and police services
- Hostels, including emergency accommodation and night shelters
- Health services
- Voluntary organisations.

The term 'intentionally homeless' was questioned by many participants who had been found IH. Participants did not feel as though they had deliberately done or not done something in consequence of which they ceased to occupy accommodation that was reasonable for them to continue occupying. Rather, many households had unmet support needs which, coupled with a personal crisis, triggered their homelessness and impaired the household's ability to make rational deliberate choices regarding their housing situation. Furthermore, a number of IH households told

us they did not agree that it had been reasonable to occupy their accommodation, due to the intolerable state of the property or other factors. Further evidence that people are not ‘intentionally’ losing their homes is the lack of awareness and understanding of the consequences of their actions when they presented to the LA as homeless.

## Solutions and recommendations

We found that in many cases the decision of IH caused considerable anxiety and hardship for the people concerned. The consequences of that decision reduced their accommodation options, often excluded the household from support services, and resulted ultimately in the continuation and, in many cases, exacerbation of a cycle of unmet support needs with the long-term resource burden that this implies.

The question at the heart of the debate on IH is whether it needs to retain its punitive character – in which case necessitating a rethink of the applicability of IH decisions to people in vulnerable circumstances – or whether, in view of the economic and social consequences of denying people access to services they clearly need, it should be reframed as a trigger for support to address the root causes of homelessness. Focussing responses on the causes of homelessness is the overarching vision of the Ten Year Homelessness Plan (2009-2019)<sup>1</sup> and is clearly congruent with the latter stance above.

Our research failed to find any examples of individuals who had deliberately made themselves homeless in order to jump the queue for social housing. While we do not dispute that this may happen, we would suggest that to repeatedly make oneself deliberately homeless is a desperate act and indicative of an acute unmet support need.

Shelter Cymru proposes a proactive approach in that we believe households found IH require assistance to access appropriate support to find and sustain a suitable tenancy and to address the wider unmet needs that led to the failure of the previous tenancy. We believe that these need to be underpinned by a statutory duty on LAs.

Our wider vision is for citizen-centred delivery of homelessness services according to need not circumstances. We want a universal service where everyone in housing need is given the assistance they require, whatever form of assistance that may be, to find a home that is right for them. The costs of providing this level of support would be offset firstly by preventing cyclical homelessness and, secondly, by allowing flexibility in the discharge of the homelessness duty. In

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<sup>1</sup> The Welsh Government Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales 2009-2019

this sense, IH would no longer be a pejorative term or a barrier to services but would activate the kind of support required to deal with the root causes of homelessness.

However, our research found that many stakeholders, particularly within LAs in Wales, believed that IH needed to remain as a sanction against households which repeatedly failed to 'take responsibility' for managing their housing circumstances. While we do not share that view, we believe it is important to stress that, if this is the response to households found IH, the Welsh Government should set a number of specific exemptions as detailed in our recommendations to ensure that only those people who are capable of falling back on to their own resources are required to do so.

We believe these exemptions should be implemented immediately as a short-term measure and should form the basis of a longer-term solution to IH that seeks to address the causes of homelessness and which, by providing the right support to find and sustain accommodation, will render the exemption of vulnerable groups unnecessary.

### **Decisions**

The present use of IH as a barrier to services makes it an inappropriate sanction for the following groups due to the particularly negative effect it has on these households:

- Young people under 25
  
- People with dependent children
  
- People with priority status due to vulnerability as a result of old age, mental illness, handicap or physical disability or other special reason
  
- In addition, we recommend that LAs pay careful consideration to IH decisions for under 35s following the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate for Local Housing Allowance in April 2012.

### **Appropriate support**

The Welsh Government should establish an approach to IH that aims to address the underlying cause of the homelessness. This means:

- Placing a statutory duty on LAs to carry out a full review of wider support needs on homelessness presentation
  
- Placing a duty on LAs to fully assist the household into appropriate accommodation - whether that is a supported project, a property with a registered social landlord (RSL) or

suitable and affordable private rented accommodation. The emphasis should be on flexible, appropriate accommodation that is dependent on individual need

- Ensuring that all households assessed as IH have a coordinated support package involving services such as health, social services and education as necessary. Support should be dependent on the needs of the particular household.

## **Structure**

The Welsh Government and LAs should seek to address the structural reasons for IH and the difficulties that low-income households have in accessing affordable housing. This means:

- A more ambitious target for affordable homes that meets the estimated need of over 5,000 below market homes every year
- Ensuring that the people who suffer negative impacts of the welfare reforms are not further penalised with IH decisions in the face of genuine affordability issues
- Increasing spending on housing and homelessness services, housing advice (including independent housing advice) and support, and homelessness prevention.

## **The private rented sector**

We recommend that the Welsh Government and LAs ensure that the PRS is a viable and sustainable option for IH households.

- LAs should ensure that any property recommended to households is inspected to ensure it reaches statutory requirements under, for example, the Housing Health and Safety Rating System
- LAs should continue to develop partnership working with private sector landlords and should ensure that bonds can be provided for all IH households for whom the PRS is appropriate. We also recommend the feasibility of providing cash bonds is explored.
- The Welsh Government should investigate the feasibility of implementing recommendations from the Communities and Culture Committee's inquiry into the PRS, in particular:
  - We recommend that the Welsh Government promotes the development and use of Social Letting Agency schemes and Private Leasing Schemes by LAs

- We recommend that the Welsh Government researches the potential effectiveness and feasibility of a mandatory licensing or registration scheme for all managers of PRS accommodation (including landlords) in Wales
- We recommend that the Welsh Government takes appropriate legislative action to enable the introduction of statutory regulation of all letting agencies in Wales
- We recommend that the Welsh Government works with LAs to develop ways of increasing tenants' knowledge of their legal rights.

## **Prevention**

We have argued in this report that IH often arises as a result of a failure to address a household's unmet support needs. Therefore, prevention should work to identify 'at risk' households before proactively working with individuals to address their needs before a housing crisis arises. The Welsh Government can help this to happen in the following ways:

- By making Leaving Home Education a statutory requirement in Welsh schools
- By placing a statutory duty on landlords to notify LAs of possession proceedings
- By placing a statutory duty on LAs to carry out homelessness prevention work at the earliest opportunity whenever the household presents
- By designing effective service-monitoring systems for LAs in order to record the outcomes of homelessness prevention.

# Introduction

The aim of the study was to examine the impact of being assessed as intentionally homeless (IH) on individuals and families in Wales. It takes account of the views and experiences of households assessed as IH, and both local authorities (LA) and service providers in order to establish recommendations for policy and practice. The study does not assess whether the original IH decision was correct for the household.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Investigate the perceived underlying behaviour leading to IH decisions from the perspective of affected households.
- Explore the impact of IH legislation on key areas such as social exclusion, repeat homelessness, health & well-being, behaviour, poverty and its effect on children.
- Explore people's needs and their perceptions of the assistance required to access and sustain settled accommodation.
- Investigate stakeholders' opinion on current legislation and explore the barriers and enablers to addressing IH.
- Set out a route for the future.

Research methods included: i/ the establishment of a steering group to oversee the research which included representatives from the voluntary sector, the Welsh Local Government Association, Homelessness Network, LAs, academic partners and the Welsh Government, ii/ In-depth interviews with 28 key stakeholders in Wales and Scotland, and iii/ In-depth interviews with 45 Welsh households assessed as IH.

The combination of interviews with stakeholders and households ensured a clear picture of the impact of decisions on households in Wales and helped us explore alternative models of approaching IH in Wales. The research comes at a time when financial resources are scarce; therefore, the discussion on solutions focus on the prevention of IH, effective joint-working across sectors and 'spending to save' in order to achieve sustainable housing outcomes for households. The recommendations focus on the argument that IH should be reframed as a trigger for support to address the root causes of homelessness and the need for attention to address the structural reasons for homelessness such as a lack of accessible affordable homes for IH households on a low income. Finally, we argue that if IH continues to be used punitively then it is an inappropriate

sanction for certain groups of people for whom the effects of decisions are particularly devastating<sup>2</sup>.

## Context of the study

Intentional homelessness was a late introduction into The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977<sup>3</sup>. Although not in the original Bill, it was added during the Commons debates supposedly to deter ‘scroungers’ and ‘rent dodgers’ because LAs and the Opposition were concerned about the financial burdens of the Act and effects on local authority allocation policies.<sup>4</sup>

*‘There was an idea that the homeless were being brought to the front of the queue ahead of ‘deserving’ waiting list applicants.’<sup>5</sup>*

The concept of IH has long been controversial and proving that some people make themselves homeless on purpose in order to take advantage of the legislation has been a cause of much debate. Over the years LAs and the courts have gone beyond trying to prove IH in this way and decisions are made not on whether there was a conscious decision by the applicant to lose their home but whether something they did or did not do led to homelessness, whether they intended that to happen or not.

Over time the image of an IH family has conjured up a stereotypical image of a household evicted one week for bad behaviour and re-housed the next week. Nevertheless, in reality, people are found IH for reasons as diverse as an inability to manage personal finances, behavioural issues caused by mental ill-health and, particularly in the case of young people, as a consequence of family conflict (Shelter Cymru, 2007).

**“The majority of intentional homeless decisions are about poverty issues, rent or mortgage arrears not conduct issues. But one or two anti-social behaviour type cases command all the attention”**  
Shelter Scotland

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<sup>2</sup> A particular difficulty of the current research was to establish the impact of the IH decision as opposed to the impact of homelessness on people’s lives. The current research is intended to be illustrative and caution is warranted with regard to the conclusions that can be drawn about causal relationships. Nevertheless, the current research has ecological validity in that we spoke directly to the people affected by IH decisions. The report conveys the results of our interactions with participants and transparently presents our method and results in order for the reader to reach their own conclusion.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix one for the legal definition of intentional homelessness

<sup>4</sup> Wendy Wilson, The Homelessness Bill, (Research Paper 01/58, House of Commons Library, 26 June 2001). See also Hansard, House of Commons Debates, 18 February 1977, columns 898-90, 905 and 972, and 8 July 1977, columns 1607-1673.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

A Shelter Cymru report 'Clear Intentions – reforming intentional homelessness in Wales' (2007)<sup>6</sup> argued that people found IH should be assisted to confront their problems and engage with services to help address their often complex support issues. It is through this challenging approach that Shelter Cymru hypothesised that inclusive and long-term solutions can be achieved.

**“It’s a long-standing argument. Every scrap of evidence we have shows that if you simply wash your hands of people they don’t go away, they just become more chaotic and more damaged and impinge more on Social Services, Health Services and the Criminal Justice System. It’s not effective and not cost effective. It’s more logical to provide the right support” Shelter Scotland**

There are contrasting views on the necessity of IH and its impact on households assessed as such. Some stakeholders hold the view that effect of IH can be far-reaching as it severely restricts the options and support available to households and can condemn people to transient lifestyles in insecure accommodation (Shelter Cymru, 2007). Additional anecdotal evidence from Shelter Cymru casework suggests that finding people IH can exacerbate the spiral of social exclusion and poverty instead of dealing with the causal issues. Nevertheless, an alternative view is that IH is a necessary sanction to deter people from recklessly mismanaging their housing tenancies and is an essential part of the homelessness legislation.

## **Intentional homelessness in Wales**

Although over recent years there has been a decrease in the number of households accepted as homeless, there has been an increase in figures of 13% between the January to March quarter (2011) compared to the same quarter of 2010. The percentage of households found to be IH annually between 2003-2004 and 2010-2011 has been between 3 per cent and 6 per cent of all homeless applications made.

Overall, there has been a general downward trend with regards to the number of households eligible, homeless and in priority need but assessed as IH since 2004/2005 (see figure 1). However, there has been a slight increase between the periods 2009/2010 to 2010/2011. Nevertheless, this could be explained by the increase in homelessness applications as opposed to an increase in IH per se.

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<sup>6</sup> Shelter Cymru, 2007. Clear Intentions - Reforming intentional homelessness in Wales. Accessed from: <http://www.sheltercymru.org.uk/images/pdf/Clear%20Intentions.pdf>

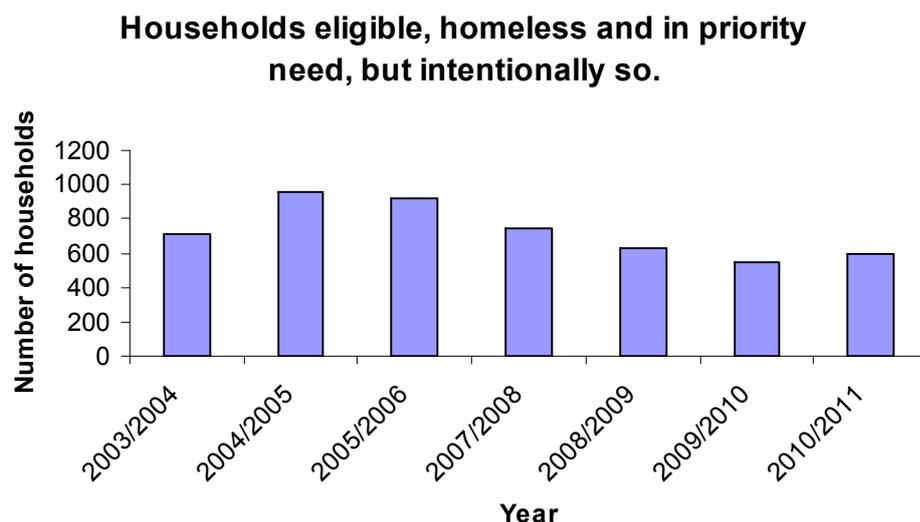


Figure 1. Households found intentionally homeless 2003/2004-2010/2011. Source – First Statistical Release (2011)

## The provision of support and assistance for intentionally homeless households in Wales

The provision of assistance for IH households varies across LAs in Wales and there is a lack of consistency with regard to the approach to providing advice and additional support across authority areas. Due to a lack of available resources, some LAs are only able to offer a basic duty of advice, which involves providing information on the private rented sector (PRS) and guidance on where households could receive assistance with bonds. When additional support is offered, it varies between LAs and includes the following: the provision of a paper bond (there tends to be a very limited budget for cash bonds) for some IH households; the use of prevention fund monies to provide assistance such as rent in advance or an incentive for private landlords to accept tenants; linking households up with housing options and housing register teams and; providing practical assistance such as photocopying adverts and referring households to Social Services or Supporting People.

## The ‘Scottish model’

Recent developments in Scotland have heralded changes in the approach to IH. The Homelessness Task Force (2002)<sup>7</sup> produced a series of 59 recommendations in order to change the way services to homeless people were delivered. The recommendations addressed

<sup>7</sup> Homelessness Task Force, (2002), *Helping Homeless People – An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response – Homelessness Task Force Final Report*, Scottish Executive

homelessness legislation, policy and the culture of delivery. It was thought that there was a need for a culture shift amongst service providers to promote empowerment of homeless people via increasing their rights, control and choice (Scottish Executive). A major part of the legislative change is the 2012 target to abolish the priority need test. Other changes involve amendments to the test for IH and local connection.

The Housing Act (Scotland) 1987 stipulates that LAs have a duty to investigate if homeless applicants in priority need are IH and, if so, offer advice, assistance and temporary accommodation. The Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 (the 2003 Act) changes the duty to investigate IH to a power. If investigated and found IH, the 2003 Act requires LAs to offer the applicant a short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST) with accompanying housing support. This is with a view to a conversion to a full SST after a year. There are exceptions to the right to a short SST including: those who have had a short SST terminated in the last year; if a member of the household has been evicted for anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the last three years, or is subject to an ASB Order. Under these circumstances the duty to accommodate is limited to section 7 accommodation (hostel or short stay accommodation with no tenancy rights) with support. However, a short SST may still be offered to households as although there is no legislative entitlement, the LA is empowered to grant one (Rosengard et al., 2006). The support package (put together following a structured assessment of the applicant's circumstances and needs) aims to enable people to move on to permanent accommodation and progress is reviewed (by the LA, tenant and landlord, if not the LA) periodically. The changes in Scotland mean that a floor of rights is established and a ladder of accommodation and related support provision offered to those assessed as IH (Rosengard et al., 2006).

The Scottish Executive (2002) believe that it is right to continue to distinguish between those whose action, or inaction, contributed to their homelessness and those who became homeless through no fault of their own. They stated that completely abolishing IH would undermine housing management and their amendments provide an opportunity for the problems that led to homelessness to be resolved.

The rationale behind the changes in Scotland is that accomplishing sustainable solutions for households experiencing homelessness is better achieved by addressing the root cause of homelessness as opposed to applying tests and rationing resources. The changes aim to introduce a proactive approach to dealing with IH. LAs will still be able to undertake investigations but if a person is found IH then the authority will have a duty to provide accommodation and support to address the cause of the homelessness in order to enable the household to sustain a tenancy successfully. This is hypothesised to prevent IH households falling into 'no-man's land' where private renting is the only option (Homelessness Task Force, 2002).

“You might as well expend your energy looking at the needs of the household rather than applying tests” Scottish Executive, Homelessness Policy

Despite considerable progress toward the target of removing the priority need test, other parts of the legislation – namely regarding IH and local connection – have yet to be fully implemented. The reason for the delay in the implementation of the IH aspect of the legislation is that currently all of the Scottish LAs’ energy is being expended on implementing and adjusting to the removal of the priority need test. Whilst there was a target set for the removal of the priority need test (2012), there was no target date set for the changes to IH legislation. The changes to priority need have had a substantial impact on some Scottish LAs in terms of housing and time resources.

“Intentionality is a very small component of the overall picture, and one of the things I wanted to get across is that you can’t underestimate what the impact of the expansion of priority need has done.” Scottish Executive, Homelessness Policy

Nevertheless, there is still an appetite to implement the full package of reforms in order to achieve the aims initially set out by the Homelessness Task Force in 2002. Shelter Scotland (2011)<sup>8</sup> state that the legislation concerning intentionality (and local connection) are integral parts of the implementation plan for the 2012 commitment and should be delivered as soon as possible.

“We are now getting to the stage where it’s been eight years since Parliament said they wanted these changes and it’s not acceptable that it’s dormant on the statute book. One of the reasons why there was a package of reforms was it was felt if you took away one of the rationing devices on its own, like priority need, then councils may fall back on intentional homelessness or local connection as a bigger filter” Shelter Scotland, Personal correspondence.

Various stakeholders have raised concerns with the changes made to the homelessness legislation in Scotland. There has been an increase of 20% in the number of applications assessed as IH in Scotland between the period of October 09 – Mar-10 and April 10 –Sep 10. However, this is because homelessness has increased due to the inclusion of previously non-priority need households, as LAs work toward the 2012 target to abolish the priority need test. Thus IH has increased because people are being assessed who would not have been assessed at all previously as they did not meet one of the priority need categories.

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<sup>8</sup> Shelter Scotland (2011). Progress and Drift: A Review of the Homelessness Task Force Recommendations: accessed from: [Http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/progress\\_and\\_drift\\_a\\_review\\_of\\_the\\_homelessness\\_task\\_force\\_recommendations](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/progress_and_drift_a_review_of_the_homelessness_task_force_recommendations)

Another concern in Scotland is that, due to increased pressure on housing resources, there has been an increased use of temporary accommodation (for example, bed & breakfasts) since changes to the legislation and the move toward the 2012 priority need target. One fear is that any further changes, such as the implementation of the IH amendment, would add additional pressure on the already scarce housing resources of Scottish LAs and result in further temporary accommodation use. However, there has been a concerted effort to reduce the use of temporary accommodation of late and many Scottish LAs are initiating a strong focus on the homelessness prevention agenda. Successful homelessness prevention reduces the burden on LA housing stock, which in turn results in the increased likelihood that any further changes to legislation could be enacted and managed accordingly.

## The support needs of intentionally homeless households

Rosengard et al. (2006)<sup>9</sup> explored the accommodation and support needs of IH households in Scotland. They found that the key reasons for homelessness were eviction for rent arrears (26%) and giving up accommodation assessed as suitable (14%) with eviction for ASB only witnessed in a minority of cases. They also noted that repeat homelessness amongst IH households was high (between one third and 53% of households depending on the source of the information). Key problems for IH households were found to be deficits in assessments of their support needs and a lack of pro-active and comprehensive homelessness prevention.

The main support needs identified were housing/tenancy support and social work support followed by assistance with issues related to addictions, physical and mental health, ASB and complex needs. This indicates that homelessness is not just a housing problem and that wider support should be provided to both prevent and resolve its occurrence where necessary. The most sought and valued forms of support by households were quoted as low level support and practical help with moving on from homelessness.

Importantly, the authors noted that the support needs of IH households were not distinguishable from homeless households in general. This suggests that IH households should be provided with support services relevant to their assessed support needs, rather than there being a need for specific services for IH households. Nevertheless, there was evidence that a minority of the IH households were in receipt of housing or tenancy support following a previous homelessness application and that such support had not prevented homelessness in these cases. This illustrates the importance of engagement in support and also the appropriateness of the support provided to

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<sup>9</sup> Rosengard, A., Cunningham, G. Jackson, A. Laing, I. Jones, N (2006) *Intentionally Homeless Households in Scotland - Accommodation and Support Needs*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/19111326/0>

fully meet needs. As well as non-engagement in support by the service user, another principle reason why support needs were not being met was a lack of service capacity (Rosengard et al., 2006).

## The aim of the current study

IH legislation is over 30 years old and is a contentious area of the homelessness legislation. Although IH represents a relatively small proportion of all homelessness applications in Wales (typically between 3-6%) it is nevertheless an important area to study as each case represents a potentially very vulnerable household whose life has reached a homelessness crisis and may require support to address the underlying reasons for this. Each IH case also represents costs to LAs and other organisations.

The research comes at a time when, as a result of the referendum vote on 3 March 2011, the National Assembly has primary legislative competence in all matters related to housing. On 12 July the First Minister announced that his Government intends to introduce a Housing Bill for Wales, including action to address homelessness. Furthermore, the current financial situation has created considerable pressure to refine and streamline service provision wherever possible. This research is therefore very timely and we hope its findings are taken into account in the Welsh Government's deliberations over how homelessness services should best meet people's needs.

## Method

In order to meet the research objectives, households assessed as intentionally homeless (IH) and the professionals working with them had to be central to the study. Details on each aspect of the method are given below. The study was primarily qualitative in nature and the data collected as part of this research study was concerned with personal views and experiences.

### The steering group

An important part of the research included the establishment of a steering group to oversee the research. The steering group included representatives from the voluntary sector, the Welsh Local Government Association, Homelessness Network, Local Authorities (LAs), academic partners and the Welsh Government. The steering group met with the research team on two occasions during the research process to comment on the direction and emerging trends in the collected data. The steering group also provided comments on a draft copy of the full report.

### Literature and good practice review

The research team undertook a literature and policy review to highlight good practice with regard to both the prevention of IH and supporting IH households following homeless presentation. Examples are used from Wales and Scotland, where homelessness legislation reform has taken place.

### Service provider and local authority in-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were undertaken with 28 key staff at statutory and voluntary services in order gauge perspectives on current legislation and how stakeholders believe IH households can be assisted to achieve sustainable housing solutions. The research team spoke to 25 stakeholders in Wales and three stakeholders in Scotland.

Stakeholders in Wales included representatives from: LAs, housing and homelessness staff, Leaving Care teams, Social Services, interim accommodation staff, drug support workers, hostel staff, resettlement officers and advocate workers.

We sampled stakeholders from 13 LAs in Wales and ensured a wide geographical spread and a mix of urban and rural locations.

Stakeholders in Scotland included: LA housing personnel, a voluntary organisation and the Scottish Executive.

## Interviews with intentionally homeless households

Central to the current research was the consideration of the experiences and perceptions of IH households. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were completed with 45 households that had been assessed as IH by the LA. Details of the sample are as follows:

- Households were sampled from 17 LAs in Wales including a wide geographical spread and encompassing both urban and rural locations.
- 43% of the sample was female and 57% male.
- The ages of the participants ranged between 19 and 62.
- 38% of the sample had dependent children (number of dependents ranged from 1-7).
- Reasons for being assessed as having priority need status included having dependent children, being a prison leaver, fleeing domestic abuse and physical and mental health problems.
- Reasons for being found IH included non-payment of rent, abandonment of property deemed suitable, misuse of accommodation and anti-social behaviour.
- The time frame for being assessed as IH ranged from decisions made this year (some of which were under appeal) to having been assessed as IH in 1994.

Participants were sampled via Shelter Cymru case files, hostels and support projects and included households who had since secured settled accommodation through to those who were still homeless.

# Results

## Introduction

This results chapter is divided into four sections which have the following objectives: i] to describe the accommodation pathways intentionally homeless (IH) households take into and out of homelessness ii] to present a thematic analysis of the effect of IH decisions on household's lives iii] to present a summary of views and discussion on the current IH legislation and iv] to explore solutions to IH and overcoming barriers to solutions.

## The accommodation pathways and support needs of intentionally homeless households

The 'pathways' approach to homelessness (Clapham, 2002)<sup>10</sup> is a way in which to analyse the two factors thought to contribute to homelessness i.e. the combination of structural forces (for example, employment, housing market conditions and public policies) and individual actions or agency (the causes of homelessness being the individual pathology of the homeless person). Agency is associated with a policy response that distinguishes between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' behaviour such as the concept of IH and focuses intervention at the level of the individual (Clapham, 2003)<sup>11</sup>.

Whilst there is substantial heterogeneity amongst the pathways of IH households, this chapter illustrates the three key accommodation and support pathways identified by the research<sup>12</sup>: i] a young person (under 25) chaotic/support issues pathway; ii] an entrenched chaotic/support issues pathway and iii] a dependent children/support needs pathway. However, the research sample is likely to have influenced the nature of the pathways identified. It is likely that there is an additional pathway: iv] a one off crisis/no support issues pathway. Nevertheless, despite efforts during the research, we only spoke with one IH household who would fall into this category and we believe those who fall into this category would be a small minority. Due to the low numbers in the current study we have not discussed pathway iv in great detail; however, we acknowledge it may be applicable for a small number of IH households. We also acknowledge that pathway iv IH may

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<sup>10</sup> Clapham, D. (2002) "Housing Pathways: A Post Modern Analytical Framework" Housing, Theory and Society vol. 19 no. 2 pp.57- 68.

<sup>11</sup> Clapham, D. (2003) "A Pathways Approach to Homelessness Research" Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology vol 13 pp 1-9.

<sup>12</sup> It was only possible to discern the accommodation and support pathways of 38 of the 45 IH participants interviewed for this research. Due to the low numbers, caution must be warranted when interpreting these results. Pathways are indicative rather than fully representative.

increase in coming years as both tenants and homeowners face increasing rent/mortgage affordability issues in the current economic climate.

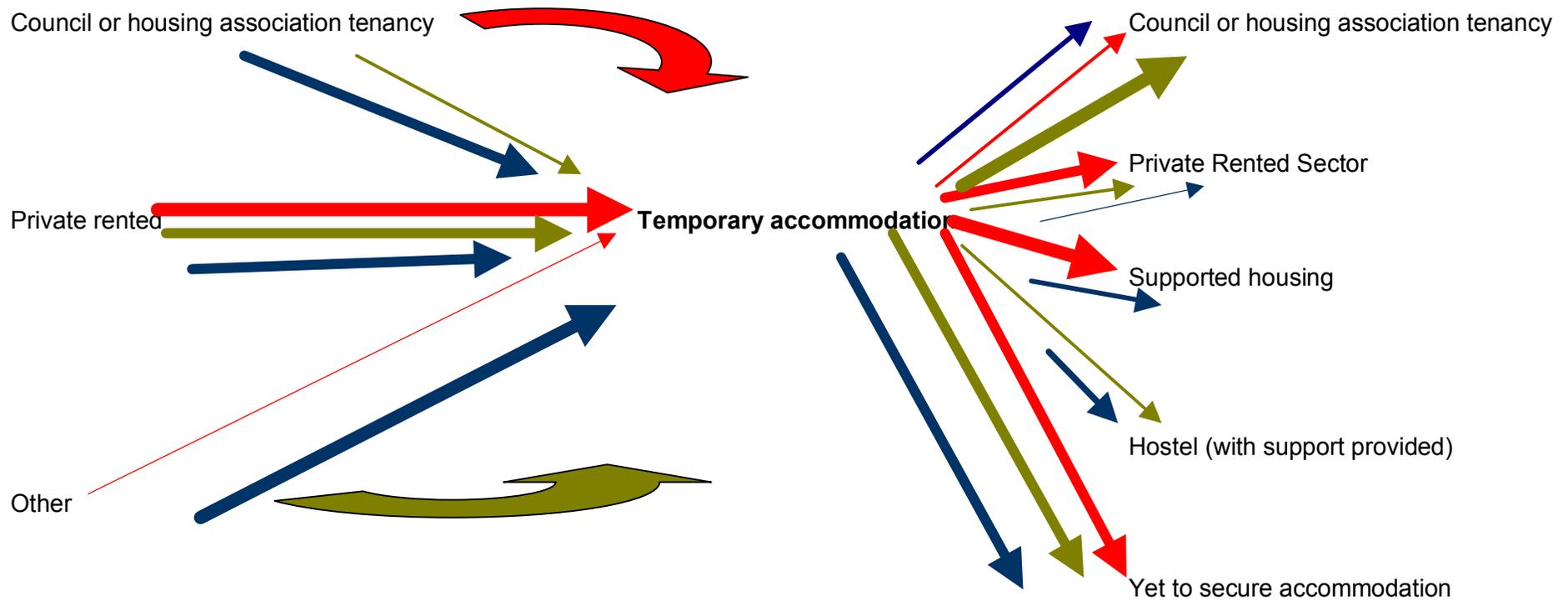
### A young person (under 25) chaotic/support issues pathway

A number (7) of the IH households interviewed as part of the study followed the young person chaotic/support issue (YPCSI) pathway. This pathway is defined as young people (mainly single individuals, as opposed to families) whose accommodation pathways, both before and after the IH decision, are characterised by a number of moves through unstable accommodation such as 'sofa surfing' plus frequent stays in temporary accommodation (such as bed and breakfasts) and prison. Households in this pathway were most likely to have been found IH due to offences related to misuse of accommodation prior to a prison stay, non-payment of rent or anti-social behaviour. Their current support needs centre around problems with substance misuse, mental health problems (primarily depression and anxiety) and offending behaviour.

Figure 1. illustrates typical accommodation moves in and out of IH. The figure shows that some people in the YPCSP pathway come in to IH from council or housing association accommodation, the Private Rented Sector (PRS) or from 'other' accommodation. 'Other' can include the family home, supported accommodation or denote that it was not possible to distinguish accommodation from the data collected.

Figure 1. shows the final move out of temporary accommodation (if applicable at time of interview). However, IH households in the YPCSP pathway made a number of accommodation moves during the process including periods of 'sofa surfing'. At the time of interview, some of the participants were able to secure accommodation through a housing association, PRS or temporary hostel with support (For example, The Wallich). Although such a hostel is not permanent it is classed as settled accommodation in the current study as IH participants are able to stay for a period of time while acquiring independent living skills. Nevertheless, the majority of people currently in the hostel with support have uncertain housing futures.

Finally, a proportion of households has yet to secure accommodation and are currently sofa surfing or street homeless.



Key: Red = **Dependent children pathway**  
 Green = **Chaotic pathway/support issues (under 25)**  
 Blue = **Chaotic pathway/support issues**

\* Thicker arrows indicate the most frequently taken routes

**Figure 2. The accommodation pathways of IH households**



### Entrenched chaotic/support issues pathway

A considerable proportion of IH households interviewed (16) as part of the study followed the entrenched chaotic/support issue (ECSI) pathway. This pathway is defined as individuals (mainly single individuals, as opposed to families) whose accommodation pathways, both before and after the IH decision, are characterised by a number of moves through repeat homelessness, rough sleeping, unstable accommodation such as 'sofa surfing', frequent stays in temporary accommodation (such as bed and breakfasts) and prison. Reasons for IH include anti-social behaviour, non-payment of rent and misuse of previous tenancy. IH households in the ECSI pathway were distinguishable by the high incidence of rough sleeping and repeat homelessness over several years. Their support needs are long-standing and have not been addressed. Typical issues include: prolonged substance misuse (mainly alcohol), mental health (primarily depression and anxiety), poor physical health and offending behaviour.

Figure 1. illustrates typical accommodation moves in and out of IH. The figure shows that people in the ECSI pathway come in to IH from council or housing association accommodation, the PRS or from 'other' accommodation. 'Other' includes supported accommodation or denotes that it was not possible to distinguish accommodation from the data.

Figure 1. shows that some of the participants in this pathway have since secured stable housing via a housing association, while others are in supported housing or in a temporary hostel where they do receive some support (for example, The Wallich). Very few have accessed the PRS and a substantial number have yet to secure any accommodation and continue to sofa surf or sleep rough.

### Dependent children/support issues pathway

A considerable proportion of IH households interviewed (15) as part of the study followed the dependent children/support issue (DCSI) pathway. This pathway is defined as households for where there are dependent children present but the family exhibit support needs that could affect their ability to maintain a tenancy. Reasons for the IH decision were mainly to do with rent arrears or abandonment of properties deemed suitable. This sample contained a high proportion of single female parents. The current accommodation needs of this sample centre on affordability issues while their support needs include guidance with money management and independent living. Some of the sample also reported issues with depression and anxiety. This sample was less likely to exhibit anti-social behavioural issues or substance abuse.

Figure 1. illustrates typical accommodation moves in and out of IH. The figure shows that people in the DCSI pathway tend to come in to IH from council or housing association accommodation or from the PRS.

Figure 1 shows that a small percentage in this pathway have since secured stable housing via a council or housing association property, some are in the PRS (often helped by the bond scheme) but many are currently in supported housing (schemes such as Save The Family). However, a substantial number have yet to secure any accommodation at the time of interview and are currently residing in a guesthouses or staying apart from their dependents until their housing crisis resolves. There were considerably less accommodation moves between loss of accommodation and settled accommodation than the other pathways and less incidences of repeat homelessness.

### One off crisis/no support issues pathway

It has not been possible to plot the accommodation pathway for IH households who fall into this category due to low numbers. However, it is likely that a small number of people may find themselves IH following a one off life crisis and once the crisis has been resolved they are able to successfully seek, acquire and maintain stable accommodation. They are unlikely to have additional support needs that could interfere with their ability to maintain their tenancy. In the current study we spoke to Roger (pseudonyms have been used for all participants in this study), a father of two, who lost his family home following the loss of his employment. Roger was also going through a relationship breakdown at the time and, momentarily distracted, had failed to keep up with rent payments on his private rented accommodation. The subsequent loss of his employment compounded this situation and, following eviction, was assessed as IH by the LA. Roger and family stayed with friends before quite quickly securing the family a property in the PRS. Now that the housing crisis is resolved, Roger feels there are no further support needs to be addressed to ensure he and his family do not become homeless again.

### Intentional homelessness – structure or agency

It has not been possible to fully establish the complex interplay between structure and agency – and how it leads to IH – in the current study. However, we found that the most frequent reason for IH decisions was rent arrears. Rent arrears amongst IH households arose for a number of reasons. These reasons were:

i/ A lack of affordable accommodation resulting in people taking on properties they cannot afford. A lack of affordable accommodation is a major structural reason for homelessness.

ii/ A lack of budgeting skills either due to a lack of independent living skills (most commonly younger people) or unresolved issues such as substance misuse leading to poor financial management (which could result in Local Housing Allowance not being passed on to landlords in the PRS, failure to pay other bills and utilities etc).

iii/ A failure to prioritise rent. This could be due to a lack of education regarding the consequences of non-payment of rent, behavioural problems, mental health problems or unresolved support needs (for example, substance misuse) taking precedence over the payment of rent.

iv/ Changes in personal circumstances (for example, relationship breakdown or a change in employment circumstances) resulting in once-affordable property becoming unaffordable.

Thus there is evidence of both structure (a lack of education, affordable accommodation and employment) and agency (substance misuse and anti-social behaviour). However, the complex interplay between the two requires further examination in future studies - for example, are substance misuse and behavioural problems preceded and exacerbated by structural issues such as lack of employment and a lack of affordable housing in the case of IH households?

Finally, in the current study it was not possible to include a case matched sample of households by which we could compare the routes in and out of homelessness and longer term housing outcomes. Thus future research in this area is warranted to thoroughly assess the effect of IH decisions on people's lives both short and long-term.

## The impact of intentional homeless decisions on the lives of households

*“Appropriate accommodation is the cornerstone for which everything else depends. Not having it has significant affects on a person's life” Leaving Care Team, North Wales*

The research found evidence that IH decisions can have an overwhelmingly negative effect on important life areas. This results section is structured around five themes that emerged from the interviews with stakeholders and IH households: i] Being assessed as IH leading to reduced housing options resulting in prolonged periods of homelessness; ii] Adverse effects of being assessed as intentionally homeless and subsequent homelessness; iii] Deterioration of unmet support needs that led to homelessness; iv] A cycle of poverty and repeat homelessness; v] The especially damaging impact of IH decisions for young people. Due to the length and complexity of this chapter, key findings are highlighted at the start of each section.

## Reduced housing options resulting in prolonged periods of homelessness

### KEY FINDINGS

- Being assessed as intentionally homeless can dramatically reduce the chances of a household securing stable accommodation in both the short and long term.
- Households assessed as intentionally homeless are effectively excluded from Local Authority housing stock and have a severely reduced chance of obtaining social housing at all.
- Households assessed as intentionally homeless are expected to seek accommodation in the private rented sector, however this is difficult for many due to the affordability of the sector, problems providing deposits/bonds and stigmatisation of the intentional homelessness decision. When accessing the private rented sector, intentionally homeless households are vulnerable to accepting poor standards.
- When intentionally homeless households fail to secure accommodation they can put themselves in positions whereby their vulnerability is compounded.

Being assessed as IH results in reduced chances of acquiring secure accommodation in both the short and long term. The evidence suggests that this effect arises for a number of reasons. One such reason is no, or reduced, access to social housing. Once assessed as IH, the Local Authority (LA) does not have a duty to secure accommodation past the period deemed reasonable by that LA for the household to secure their own accommodation. Therefore, given the lack of housing stock, it is unlikely that the household would be provided with LA accommodation.

*“The council have no obligation other than to find them accommodation for 28 days. They’re left high and dry.” Hostel Worker, North Wales*

Typically there are long waiting lists for social housing and households often lose some priority points following the decision therefore reducing the probability they would be assigned social housing of any kind. Chances are further reduced for IH households if they have rent arrears. Households assessed as IH are effectively excluded from LA housing stock and have a severely reduced chance of obtaining social housing at all, particularly as many LAs and registered social landlords are part of joint/common waiting lists.

*“I am back on the list (for social housing – housing association) I don’t know if they’ll take me because I owe them arrears” IH participant, 33, Female, Mid Wales*

Therefore, many households assessed as IH are forced to seek housing in the private rented sector (PRS). However, we found that many IH households have difficulties accessing the PRS for

a number of reasons. The main reason is due to the affordability of PRS accommodation, which is typically more expensive than social housing. The PRS is a difficult sector for households that are on low incomes or welfare benefits and many households faced with IH will fall into one of these categories.

*“I’ve got no money for a deposit and the cost of private accommodation is too high.” IH participant, 58, Male, North Wales*

*“The bond board may help some people to access private rented accommodation but it is often more expensive and can result in the individual accruing rent arrears. This can then lead to a cycle of rent arrears and a loss of tenancy and repeat homelessness” Hostel manager, South Wales*

The PRS may be particularly difficult to access for IH households under the age of 25 due to the restriction of the Shared Accommodation Rate for under 25s (under 35s as of January 2012; SAR). Thus fewer young people are likely to be able to afford to access and sustain accommodation in the sector (explored in more detail further on in this report).

The majority of IH households we spoke to were in receipt of housing benefit which again poses problems in terms of finding a landlord to take them on as tenants. This further reduces the chances of securing PRS accommodation when combined with the stigma of an IH decision.

*“People don’t want to take me. Firstly because I’m on benefits and secondly because the council found me intentionally homeless. They won’t take the risk. I’m on the Homes4u but because I have been found IH the highest they will give me is silver” IH participant, female, 49, South Wales*

*“I found 12 places and all they were interested in was bonds. I couldn’t get a reference which didn’t help.” IH participant, 47, male, south Wales*

When IH households do manage to secure accommodation in the PRS they are vulnerable to accepting low standard accommodation. Not only can this affect the health and well-being of the household, it also reduces the chances that the tenancy will be sustained.

*“Being classed as IH essentially closes the door to receive help from the LA and forces the client to seek accommodation through the private rented sector. This means higher rents and quite often a poor standard and therefore a higher likelihood on tenancy failure” Resettlement Worker*

*“(where I am now) it’s a hole, it’s dirty, stains on the carpet and the landlord won’t do anything about it. I would like a single tenancy, but the money and I can’t afford that at the moment” IH participant, 40, North Wales, Male*

*“There is mould everywhere. My daughter is asthmatic and this place is bad for her but nothing has been done. If I leave then what? The same stuff again with the council. How do I protect my family? I have never been aware of intentional homelessness but now I’m constantly afraid of it” IH participant, 23, South Wales, female.*

Finally, IH households are disadvantaged by limited assistance from the LA to seek accommodation. Many of the IH households we spoke to had support needs (for example, substance misuse or mental health problems or chaotic lifestyles) that were not only likely to have contributed to their homelessness but are also likely to hinder their ability to source and obtain accommodation without support.

*“We can only advise and are limited in our options” Housing options worker, South Wales*

*“If they have been made IH they fall through the net and no support is given to them, I’m guessing they are the ones that need it the most and have the least information on how to get it” Support Services Manger, Hostel*

Due to reduced housing options IH households are likely to make chaotic accommodation moves and experience extended periods of homelessness, which could lead to the household losing contact with statutory bodies and support services thus further reducing the chances of them receiving support.

*“We refer them to the private sector for advice, yet we encounter problems such as long waiting lists and many clients disappear after a while” Housing Options Worker, South Wales*

Many LAs state they provide information on housing options. Nevertheless, many of the IH households we spoke with said they did not receive this advice, or, if they did, did not find the assistance helpful in enabling them to find accommodation.

*“I seen a girl (the LA housing worker) who made the decision that I had made myself intentionally homeless. She said they can’t help me, didn’t tell me anything else or help or advise me with anything.” IH participant, 47, North Wales, Female*

*“In the last couple of weeks the council has sent me a letter with housing options on it, places that are available. Yeah, £90 a week, all of them three bedroom houses. I can’t afford them, they are as much use as the paper they are printed on” IH participant, 29, male, South Wales.*

Failing to secure their own accommodation can result in IH households facing prolonged periods of homelessness. Some people put themselves in dangerous positions just to secure a roof over their head.

We spoke to Mary (IH participant, 34, South Wales), a former drug addict with mental health issues and problems with offending behaviour. Mary now sleeps in the night shelter where she feels unsafe amongst the other residents and finds it hard to stay off the drugs she once had issues with. She told us she feels scared a lot of the time. However, she still feels this is a better situation than when she was first released from prison (and was assessed as IH) and returned to live with her abusive ex-boyfriend as she felt she had no option with her housing situation. Mary felt it was wrong she was found IH 10 years ago. She states she was very young and naive when she had the tenancy and did not know how to manage her affairs. Due to her offending behaviour, substance misuse and mental health problems, Mary feels she is stuck in a cycle of offending and homelessness.

We also spoke to other households whose vulnerability was compounded by their failure to secure accommodation after the IH decision. This resulted in exploitation and potentially serious consequences for individuals’ health and safety.

*“I slept rough for a couple of nights and then stayed in places where I wish now I hadn’t with people I only vaguely knew. In one place the man made me do all of the cooking and cleaning for him” IH participant, 28, female, South Wales*

*“I went to stay with a woman and we were still together until today. She’s a drinker, worse than I was. Her place is a doss house for drinkers. She is a drunk and violent too when she’s drunk. She kicked me out this morning because my benefits have stopped. I need my own place. I can’t live like that, I’m 58 and ill. I can’t go back on the streets. I am too ill. I would die” IH participant, 58, Male, North Wales*

In sum, IH households can face difficulties securing accommodation and this can lead to prolonged periods of homelessness. We have found that prolonged periods of homelessness can result in households putting themselves in damaging and potentially dangerous positions due to their lack of housing options.

## Adverse effects of being assessed as intentionally homeless and subsequent homelessness

### KEY FINDINGS

- Many households assessed as intentionally homeless report deterioration in their personal relationships and some face isolation, loneliness and social exclusion on top of their housing crisis.
- Intentionality decisions, and subsequent homelessness, can lead to pressure on friends and family who accommodate the household during the homelessness period.
- Being assessed as intentionally homeless can increase tensions between family members affected by the decision.
- Being assessed as intentionally homeless can interfere with education, training and employment opportunities and create a cycle whereby a lack of accommodation negatively impacts on the ability to gain employment and a lack of employment reduces the chances of securing accommodation.

There are likely to be adverse effects for all households experiencing homelessness – especially extended periods of homelessness. However, IH households are often those in priority need and thus are likely to have a perceived vulnerability and heightened housing need. Despite this, the procedural decision of IH reduces the opportunities for support and does not resolve any of their issues.

We found that the effects of IH decisions, and subsequent prolonged homelessness, result in adverse influence on other important aspects of a person's life. These life areas include relationships (with a particularly negative effect on the dependent children of IH households) and education, training and employment.

Many IH households reported a marked deterioration in their relationships with other people. There were reports of friends turning their backs on households once they were assessed as IH, households distancing themselves from friends and family due to embarrassment and shame at their situation and reports of loneliness, isolation and social exclusion.

*“My son and daughter were unaware of everything. I was ashamed” IH participant, 53, South Wales, Male.*

*“The (hostel) doors were all beaten in, you are in one room with your child. You have to stay out of stuff, not get involved with the others. It's isolated” IH participant, 33, Female, Mid Wales*

We spoke to Fran, 38, who stated the accommodation she has had to accept following the IH decision has led to her feeling isolated due to its rural location away from her support networks. The isolation is also said to be having an effect on her children who she describes as “dislocated, isolated and unsettled”. Fran feels stigmatised by the IH decision and feels that it’s unlikely she’ll get a private rent due to needing to get a reference and access a deposit (which she told us she cannot as the LA assessed her as IH). She cannot work at present due to the location of her (temporary) accommodation meaning the fares in taxis and childcare is too high.

*“If someone is moving around a lot because they are found IH and have to go wherever they can find accommodation then they’re not connecting, joining in with the community – they’re not part of anything, they’re on the outside looking in at the rest of us. They must feel like outsiders”  
Homelessness Services Officer, Mid Wales*

Relationships can become strained when IH households stay with family members or friends while seeking accommodation. This can lead to overcrowding and serious consequences for the host if a condition of their tenancy is to not have other people staying over.

*“I am staying with a friend at the moment but I have to get out. We are invading his space, he is used to being on his own, but he’s trying to help us” IH participant, 47, North Wales, Female*

*“It put a strain on my relationships. My missus didn’t like the thought of me being on the streets but I couldn’t stay there for more than 2-3 days as she would get in trouble with the council, I couldn’t jeopardise her home. The same with my family – I was screwed no matter what” IH participant, South Wales, Male, 47*

Being assessed as IH can lead to tensions within the household as blame is apportioned for the loss of the family home.

*“My relationship with my daughter has been ruined because of the decision and my homelessness” IH participant, 47, North Wales, Female*

*“You know there was a big wedge driven between me and my daughter because she blamed me for losing the home. My son was slightly more accommodating but it still causes issues.” IH participant, 52, South Wales, Female.*

Another life area in which IH decisions, and subsequent homelessness, have a detrimental effect is with regard to education, training and employment opportunities. An IH decision can affect opportunities as the housing crisis takes precedence in the individual’s life.

*“You’re not thinking about work or training at the time, it comes secondary” IH participant, 33, Female, Mid Wales*

*It’s set me back big time ‘cos usually I’m quite a motivated person and I’d love to be working and doing things but the position I’m in at the moment, that’s impossible” IH participant, 19, Male, South Wales*

Those who have not obtained stable housing feel trapped in a cycle whereby their lack of stable accommodation prevents them gaining employment and their lack of employment impacts on their ability to secure accommodation.

*“There is nothing around (housing), especially if you’re on the dole. It’s a catch 22: you need a house to get a job and feel settled, but they won’t take you if you’re on the dole. You end up in supported housing like this where the rent is like £120 a week. You can’t get a job when the rent is that high.” IH participant, 33, Female, Mid Wales*

*“You can’t expect someone to start studying or working if they haven’t got somewhere secure to stay the night. How can you plan to come to work the next day and be clean and tidy?” Housing support officer*

In sum, IH decisions, and the subsequent homelessness, can have a negative impact on households’ personal relationships. We have also found that being assessed as IH can have a detrimental affect on education, training and employment opportunities.

### Deterioration of unmet support needs that led to homelessness

#### KEY FINDINGS

- A number of households assessed as intentionally homeless suffer from some degree of depression and anxiety. These conditions are likely to worsen following an intentionality decision.
- There are households that have mental health issues that are interfering with their ability to maintain their tenancy and, due to lack of engagement with health or support services or a failing to meet a pre-defined criteria, are failing to receive support from health or housing sectors.
- Physical health is likely to deteriorate in those assessed as intentionally homeless especially if there are periods of rough sleeping involved.
- Being assessed as intentionally homeless is likely to lead to deterioration in alcohol and drug use. This is either because substances are used to alleviate the negative affects of homelessness or an inability to stabilise individuals without stable accommodation.

- Intentional homelessness often arises as a result of unmet support needs that require addressing to prevent further negative effects on the individual

Many of the IH households we spoke to had a number of unmet support needs that were likely to have played a part in their homelessness. The most common support needs were mental and physical health problems, substance misuse and offending behaviour. There was evidence that these problems worsened following the IH decision.

A number of IH households experienced mental health difficulties, most commonly, but not exclusively, depression and anxiety. These conditions may develop as a result of the IH decision but are more likely to have been pre-existing conditions made worse by homelessness. Whilst it could be argued that the deterioration in households' mental health was a result of the homelessness crisis, as opposed to the IH decision per se, there was evidence to suggest that the IH decision further compounded the situation in two ways: i] by reducing the chances of securing accommodation quickly, thus prolonging homelessness and all of its associated problems, and ii] by bringing about feelings of desperation and isolation as a result of lack of support from the LA.

*“I was deflated by it all (the IH decision). I felt like an outcast. My daughter was concerned because of the mental health problems I had had in the past. She thought I was going to do something stupid” IH participant, female, 49, South Wales*

*“I have had depression and suffered fits but this was normal for me. Although my depression has got worse since the decision.” IH participant, female, 52, South Wales*

There was also evidence that IH households' physical health deteriorated following the IH decision. This was especially true for households who spent a period of time rough sleeping.

*“My weight has gone right down. I don't eat properly and I got sick from the stress and the cold on the street. I ended up in hospital” IH participant, 47, male, south Wales*

Mental health issues can interfere with a household's ability to maintain a tenancy, however, IH households may not have engaged with health professionals in order to obtain an official diagnosis. Other IH households may not reach the Health criteria (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV axis) for having a mental health issue such as clinical depression or an anxiety disorder, however, they may still exhibit symptoms to the degree to which sustaining a tenancy is difficult without some degree of support. Thus there may be households neither picked up by health services nor recognised as 'vulnerable' by housing services.

*“A lot of our service users have mental health issues even if they haven’t engaged with other services enough to have a diagnosis. There are increasing numbers of people with mental health issues such as depression, paranoia and schizophrenia. These things are adverse to holding down a tenancy.” Emergency Bed Coordinator*

Many of the IH households we spoke to reported deterioration in pre-existing substance misuse issues. Reasons for this were either that households were using substances to help alleviate the negative effects of homelessness or an inability to stabilise drug taking without suitable and stable accommodation.

*“The number of people who have been found IH that I know of who end up using heroin just to get through the night... I can’t count them anymore.” Criminal Justice Link Officer*

*“I was drinking more, obviously being on the street you need something to just keep you warm or something.” IH participant, 19, Male, South Wales*

This can have a particularly damaging effect in the case of ex-offenders. If alcohol or drug taking is not stabilised then the household could remain trapped in a cycle of substance misuse, offending and prison.

*“I had to go to the bail hostel for 6 weeks and after that I went to the B&B and I was sorted after that. I was off the drink and everything. But the minute they found me intentionally homeless I was back on the streets and that was it, the first thing I did was buy a bottle of cider” IH participant, 21, Male, Mid Wales*

We found evidence that IH decisions, and the resulting homelessness, resulted in an increase in re-offending for prison leavers.

*“It was hard not to re-offend ‘cos I was on the streets. I had no money or nothing. I was hungry. I would nick a sandwich and that” IH participant, 21, Male, Mid Wales*

*“I had left prison and was trying to stay clean and that is why I slipped back into drugs – I was basically on the streets. I got myself clean in prison and thought I would come out and make a fresh start but it didn’t happen I ended up scoring within the first hour of leaving the council. I thought f\*\*\* it, what else am I meant to do. If it wasn’t for this decision I would have been clean a lot longer than I have now and I wouldn’t have been sent back to jail.” IH participant, 47, South Wales, Male.*

Evidence was accrued that suggested that IH is a manifestation of unmet support needs. Some IH households interviewed stated that it wasn't the IH decision that continues to negatively affect their lives, but rather their unmet support needs are what prevent them from progressing in their life.

*"I don't think the IH decision has affected my life completely. It has been loads of little things building up that has led me to where I am now" IH participant, 22, Male North Wales*

*"My depression has affected my life more than my homelessness as it was that that has shaped everything I have done" IH participant, 53, South Wales.*

In sum, being assessed as IH can result in a deterioration of mental and physical health as well as lead to a cycle of substance misuse and re-offending. The evidence suggests that IH occurs as an accumulation of unmet support needs and these unmet support needs lead to homelessness and compounded disadvantage.

### A cycle of poverty and repeat homelessness

#### KEY FINDINGS

- Households assessed as intentionally homeless can become trapped in a cycle of poverty and repeat homelessness.
- Homelessness and repeat homelessness results from a lack of affordable and accessible accommodation for intentionally homeless households and a failure to address unmet support needs that interfere with the ability to secure and maintain a tenancy.

Our pathways analysis of IH households indicated that some people become trapped in a cycle of poverty and repeat homelessness if unmet support needs are not addressed. Evidence accrued from the thematic analysis supports this hypothesis. A considerable number of IH households we spoke to have failed to secure any accommodation and remain homeless. They continue to sofa surf or sleep rough on the streets months, sometimes even years, following an IH decision. This again exacerbates the IH household's vulnerability and can leave them stuck in a cycle of social exclusion and poverty.

*"(I lived) on the streets and on someone's sofa a couple of nights. I went to my girlfriend's parents for a bit but I felt uncomfortable so I went back on the streets" IH participant, 21, Male, Mid Wales*  
*"I have been bumming around here there and everywhere since with families and friends. I have been sofa surfing for 3-4 months. At the end of the day who is going to take on a 49 year old homeless woman" IH participant, female, 49, South Wales*

*“IH households can remain homeless due to exclusion from social housing and inaccessibility of the PRS” Homelessness Officer, North Wales*

We argue that repeat homelessness comes about due to a reduction in accommodation that is suitable, accessible and sustainable for IH households and a failure to address unmet support needs.

*“It’s cyclic, you see the same people coming through again and again. The intentional homeless you see in street projects are the same faces coming through again and again” Support worker*

*“I had been homeless before. I was drinking very heavily at the time. I slept rough on and off for months and was in the night shelter, then I managed to get the flat but then quickly lost it.” IH participant, 58, Male, North Wales*

*“If support is not given to address the issue that caused their initial eviction then the chances are that the cycle will just repeat as they will still be unprepared to maintain a tenancy like before” Landlord of temporary accommodation*

### The especially damaging impact of intentional homelessness decisions for young people

#### KEY FINDINGS

- Being assessed as intentionally homeless can have a devastating impact on children and young people either as dependents of affected households or via being assessed as intentionally homeless themselves.
- Intentional homelessness decisions can affect dependent children directly (for example, having to relocate away from friends or having to change schools) or indirectly (for example, through the stress of family homelessness).
- Being assessed as intentionally homeless results in feelings of anxiety for adults and their children worried that their family will be separated through Social Service involvement.
- Young people are losing tenancies due to a lack of independent living skills and/or unmet support needs. The intentional homelessness decision is likely to negatively impact on their long-term future accommodation options and result in a cycle of repeat homelessness if not addressed.

We found that being assessed as IH can have a particularly negative effect on young people (defined as those under the age of 25). This can affect young people in two ways: 1/ being the dependent child of a household assessed as IH, or, 2/ being a young person who presents as

homeless to the LA and is subsequently assessed as being IH. Each of these scenarios is explored in turn next.

The effect of IH decisions on dependent children was a major theme in the current research. There was considerable evidence of the direct negative effect IH decisions can have on the dependent children of households assessed as IH.

The detrimental impact of IH decisions can arise due to the disruption of relocating to another area due to homelessness. Any case of homelessness is likely to have a negative effect on children and young people and involve upheaval and disruption. However, for IH households with reduced housing options it is more likely that they would have to relocate to access stable accommodation. This can result in children having to change schools, which can disrupt their education and distance them from important friends and peers.

*“We’re in the middle of nowhere. It has been hard for the children moving away from the area we know and they have had to change schools” IH participant, 29, Female, North Wales*

*“Things don’t seem to be getting any better. I fight every day to get a house. The kids are getting fed up. They are both in school in a different area and have to travel every day. It’s costing me a fortune. We had two dogs I had to give away – it broke the kids’ heart” IH participant, female, 49, South Wales*

*“In the end he was able to go back to his own school but whilst we were in the hostel he was out of school for a month because the class was full” IH participant, 33, Female, Mid Wales*

In addition, some IH households may experience extended periods of homelessness due to reduced housing options – thus the disrupted impact on family life is likely to be pronounced. We found evidence that the stress of this situation can have extremely adverse effects on a child’s mental health.

*“ One of my kids has become very depressed and the doctor advised me she is suicidal because what has been going on over the last 9-10 months (homelessness). She was sent to see a psychiatrist and is doing better but she still finds it difficult to cope” IH participant, female, 49, South Wales*

Finally, IH households with dependent children fear that, due to their homelessness, they would be separated from their children via involvement from Social Services. This was a source of anxiety for both the dependents and their guardians.

*“They knew I had a daughter and they said the only thing they could do was get in touch with social services. They frightened the life out of my daughter thinking they were going to take her away” IH participant, 47, North Wales, Female*

*“My daughter was only young and I was told the only thing I can do is call social services and if I did that they may take her away from me and put into foster care. I was so scared I would lose her.” IH participant, 23, South Wales, female.*

We spoke to Jane, assessed as IH in 2011, who was placed in a guesthouse in South Wales with her daughter. They were visited by Social Services who told Jane they were happy with her parenting but concerned for her daughter due to Jane’s housing crisis. Social Services told Jane that while she was staying at the guesthouse her daughter would not be taken into care. However, Jane is worried as to how long she will be able to remain at the guesthouse. Jane, who is currently challenging the intentionality decision with the help of Shelter Cymru, is trying to secure private rented accommodation but she has no money and the private landlords she has approached will not accept a paper bond. Jane states that her current housing situation has had an extremely negative impact on her young daughter who has been suffering from nightmares. Jane was not happy with how she has been treated by the housing department at the LA and feels that her wider needs were not assessed or housing options fully explained to her. She also felt upset when she first met with Social Services, who had no background information on her situation. A former victim of domestic abuse was forced to re-tell her story, which she found extremely distressing. Jane believes if it wasn’t for the kindness of the guesthouse owners then she would be roofless and her daughter taken into care. Jane is worried for the future and is hoping her appeal will be successful so that both her and her young daughter have more chances to secure safe secure accommodation in the future.

As well as the adverse effect on the dependent children of IH households, we found evidence of the negative impact for a young person who presents as homeless to the LA and is subsequently assessed as being IH. Some stakeholders expressed the view that a lack of affordable accommodation and IH decisions had a disproportionate effect on certain categories of young people. Following clarification of the law in the wake of the Southwark judgement, Social Services have a duty to support and accommodate homeless 16 and 17 year olds

*“16 and 17 year olds would continue to be helped by Social Services regardless of intentionality”  
Social Services, North Wales*

However, it is those young people between the ages of 18 and 24 that may be prone to more housing difficulties if expected to find and sustain accommodation in the often more expensive

PRS. The reason for this is the restriction on SAR for under 25s (under 35s as of January 2012) further limiting the choice of available lets.

*“It’s young people, not perhaps the very vulnerable (who do receive help), but say the 19/20 year olds. There’s no housing for them. They can’t afford the PRS, we need more social housing that’s affordable” Homelessness Officer, North Wales*

Many of the IH households we spoke to were vulnerable as a result of various reasons, even if they are not deemed as meeting ‘vulnerable’ criteria by the housing department. This is compounded by their young age and a lack of family support.

*“I’m getting no help from the council, even though I’m a care leaver I’m classed as intentionally homeless. I think the council could have helped me more than they did. They knew I was a care leaver as well” IH participant, 22, Male, North Wales*

*“I’ve just moved in here (hostel), I’m just shutting away a few past memories and things I’ve been through, trying to make a fresh start” IH participant, 19, Male, South Wales*

We spoke to IH households who feel their young age played a part in their homelessness and subsequent IH decision. Many feel that these decisions made when they are young have gone on to adversely affect their life with regard to their long-term accommodation options.

*“ Maybe I should have stuck it out at the flat, but I was young, only 19, and it was hard” IH participant, 33, Female, Mid Wales*

*“The rent arrears and the money I owe is getting in my way. The private landlords want over 25s. I’ve tried, I’ve been on the internet. The council were going to give me a deposit but then they said no as I was intentionally homeless. It’s holding me back because now I’m not priority need. I have tried, since I’ve been 16 I’ve been homeless. I have lived in a tent for 6 months, cooked my own food on a fire. I’ve survived. I’ve tried and I’ve tried and people keep knocking me back and knocking me back but I’ll keep on trying and trying” IH participant, 21, Male, former prison leaver, Mid Wales*

Young people are losing tenancies sometimes due to a lack of family support and independent living skills or due to unmet support needs. They are being assessed as IH that then sets them up for reduced chances of securing stable accommodation likely to follow then throughout life unless something is done to stop the cycle. Evidence from both the current thematic analysis and the

earlier pathways analysis suggest that failure to secure accommodation and address support needs may evolve into a cycle of poverty and repeat homelessness.

In sum, being assessed as IH can have a devastating impact on young people – either as the dependents of affected households or as young people receiving the decision themselves. Such decisions can have far reaching consequences for the young people involved.

## Views on intentional homelessness legislation

This section aims to present a range of stakeholders' views on the current IH legislation. We gauge thoughts on what are the perceived positives and negatives of the legislation; highlight the wider impacts to other services as a result of intentionality decisions and, finally, discuss the accuracy of the term 'intentionally homeless'.

### The positives and negatives of the current legislation

We asked stakeholders what they thought of the current IH legislation. We received a range of responses, with some viewing IH as a fair and necessary aspect of the homelessness legislation.

*“ I think the intentional homelessness law is fair and equitable. People have the legal right to a review. A legal challenge is there, it is a built in safety net. My view is that it (IH) has its own place in the legislation” Homelessness department, North Wales*

Some stakeholders interviewed believe that IH can provide an incentive for tenants to behave and without IH there would be an increase in poor behaviour.

*“(if IH was scrapped) people would take advantage of the Act” Homelessness officer, West Wales*

*“There is no point penalising people who are already struggling, however, we shouldn't be rewarding someone who has done something deliberate to get higher up on the waiting list.” Homelessness Team Manager, Mid Wales*

*“(scrapping IH) would be detrimental to the individual as it would undermine the notion that people had to understand the consequence of their actions” Housing Options Team Leader North Wales*

Other concerns voiced by stakeholders involved the effect of re-housing IH households on the wider housing community.

*“it is the wrong time to abolish intentional homelessness. There would be an impact on the community if we keep having to house people again and again” Senior Homelessness Officer, North Wales*

Regardless of opinions on the usefulness of IH legislation, the majority of workers from LA housing departments felt that, in a time of scarce housing resource, IH was a way to ration resources and assign accommodation to people. Many stakeholders believe that if IH was removed then there would not be enough accommodation to meet need and there would be an increase in use of temporary accommodation.

*“If there were unlimited resources including a plentiful supply of good quality private accommodation, then perhaps some of the restrictions could be taken away but at the moment the local authority would be overwhelmed if that happened” Homelessness Officer, West Wales*

*“More resources would be needed, it would be more work. Use of B&B would increase.” Housing Manager, South Wales*

However, rather than being an additional burden on resources, some stakeholders stated that removing IH would free up resources in terms of staff time.

*“We'd save work done on assessments. It takes days to make decisions. It would save staff time and resources” Homelessness Services Officer, Wales*

In addition, other stakeholders, including some LA housing workers, believe IH is an unhelpful classification that does not necessarily lead to sustainable housing outcomes.

*“What we want to do is help people find homes, but you're almost dividing people into the deserving and undeserving when you're making decisions on intentional homelessness” Homelessness Services Officer, Mid Wales*

*“the pros of the legislation is that you can't just do what you want and expect the council to house you again. For some people there is a dependency culture, a kind of throwaway attitude. But the cons are the effects of decisions, the costs on society. If people were settled in suitable homes, were happier, more stable it can prevent and avoid problems further down the line” Homelessness Services Officer, Mid Wales*

## The wider impacts to other services as a result of intentional homelessness decisions

Many of the stakeholders we spoke with believe that finding households IH has a financial impact on other services, both statutory and voluntary, as well as society as a whole due to the additional resource burden. Some of the services that IH decisions stakeholders mentioned were adversely affected are:

- **Social Services** – this was especially true if there were dependent children involved
- **The criminal justice system (including probation and police services)** – This is due to increases in anti-social behaviour and re-offending following a decision and subsequent homelessness. Not only is re-offending immeasurable in terms of personal cost to the offender, victim(s) and society as a whole but it also has a substantial financial impact.

*“Many individuals, in particular young people, will end up back in prison which will have a detrimental effect on the state, due to the costs that are involved in facilitating individuals within the prison system” Young Person Service Provider, West Wales*

*“If people get the housing right then there would be a saving in other areas. One of the biggest reasons for re-offending is lack of suitable housing. If you can get housing right then there are savings to be made elsewhere – if someone is stable, appropriately and securely housed then all the other services will not need to be working so hard and resources can be shifted elsewhere” Criminal Justice Link Officer*

- **Hostels (including emergency accommodation and night shelters)** – Hostels accommodate IH households that fail to secure accommodation in the PRS or elsewhere.
- **Health Services** – The impact to the health service is due to dealing with issues that may have been brought on by, or worsened by, the failure to secure suitable accommodation following an IH decision.

*“Households that are IH strain the budget of local social services and indeed mental health services due to problems suffered by being found IH.” Housing options worker, South Wales*

- **Voluntary organisations** – There is increased burden on organisations such as Shelter Cymru who challenge LAs decisions where there is cause to believe the IH decision is unlawful. There are also numerous third sector organisation that assist IH households to access accommodation and support when the LA has concluded it does not owe the household a housing duty.

## The accuracy of the term ‘intentionally homeless’

*I just think it's a contradiction that you're intentionally homeless. I don't think anyone is intentionally homeless" IH participant, mid-Wales, female, 33*

The objective of the research was not to determine whether the IH decision was correct or incorrect in the case of our participants. However, as a hypothetical argument we question the validity and accuracy of the term ‘intentionally homeless’. To be assessed as IH the person must have deliberately done or not done something in consequence of which they cease to occupy the accommodation that was reasonable for them to continue occupying. However, through the course of this results section, we have presented evidence that many IH households have unmet support needs that likely contributed to their homelessness. In addition to this, many households we spoke to were experiencing a personal crisis prior and during their housing problems thus ‘triggering’ their homelessness. We argue that the presence of unmet support needs coupled with a personal life crisis trigger could impair the household’s ability to make rational deliberate choices regarding their housing situation.

*“At the time I was struggling because my mum had bowel cancer and only had a few weeks to live, I was going in and out of hospital” IH participant, 31, Female, North Wales*

*“Life at the time was pretty difficult. I was suffering pretty bad from depression and I had started to drink alcohol. Everything was getting on top of me” IH participant, 49, South Wales, Female*

*“I was just looking after my girlfriend. She was in hospital – I sat with her – I wasn't worried about whether I had a room to go back to” IH participant, male, south wales 47, breaking hostel rules*

*“ (if I could change anything) yeah, I wouldn't have taken drugs but, you know, when certain things happen to you in life, drugs are those things that help you through... you don't think of the consequences at the time” IH participant, 28, male, Denbighshire*

Next, to be assessed as IH it must have been reasonable to continue to occupy the accommodation. However, we spoke to a number of IH households who abandoned their tenancies due to what they felt were intolerable conditions for their household. We also spoke to households who misguidedly withheld rent in an attempt to raise the standards of their living conditions. In both scenarios households were unaware that their actions would result in being assessed as IH.

*“ We were in a private let. The baby had just been born and we’d just moved in. We soon realised it was minging. There was damp all over the walls and it was freezing. We kept phoning the landlady to say but she never came. The baby kept getting sick with chest infections and coughs. We had to get out of there. We went to the council but they said we shouldn’t have left and we should go back. The council said it was reckless for us to leave a house without a plan with a baby. But all we knew was that the baby was always ill in that house but has been fine since. I did think the council would help us. They made us feel like we were trying it on to get a council house, but we weren’t, it was grim” IH participant, 18, female, Mid Wales*

We spoke to Fran, 38, North Wales, who has three dependent children. She told us how she withheld rent from a private landlord due to disrepair that the landlord had failed to act upon – the subsequent rent arrears and eviction led to an IH decision from the LA. She knows she did the wrong thing by withholding the rent, but at the time she felt like it was the right thing to do to try to get the landlord to address the disrepair at the property. She did not realise it would result in her being deemed IH. She feels she is now being punished for trying to do the right thing for her family.

Further evidence that people are not ‘intentionally’ losing their homes is the lack of awareness and understanding of the consequences of their actions when they present to the LA as homeless.

*“ when my 28 days was up, my support worker at the time tried to explain it to me but I didn’t understand it really”. IH participant, 22, North Wales*

*“ I didn’t understand that just by staying out an extra night I had made myself intentionally homeless. I hadn’t even heard of the term before” IH participant, 47, South Wales, Male. IH for breaking hostel rules.*

*“ They (the LA) are quick to make the decision you are intentionally homeless but I mean 9/10 times it’s not intentional... people just don’t have the money to survive. I think they need to look at the bigger picture when deciding intentional homelessness. They didn’t consult me much and I don’t think they took anything I said into consideration, they took his (the landlord’s) word over mine. Not everything is the tenant’s fault, though I think the council think otherwise” IH participant, female, 49, South Wales*

Evidence in the current study suggests that people are not ‘intentionally’ losing their homes. We argue that those assessed as IH are, for the most part, often reacting to the accumulation of unmet support needs coupled with a personal life crisis. Already disadvantaged, the stigma of being assessed ‘intentionally homeless’ further reduces chances of securing stable accommodation in the future.

## Solutions to intentional homelessness and overcoming barriers

This section explores solutions and barriers to assisting IH households using evidence from the current study as well as existing literature and knowledge of good practice (both in Wales and Scotland). The chapter focuses on three broad themes to overcoming the negative impact of IH: i] changes to current policy and practice and IH legislation ii] the prevention of IH and iii] assisting IH households to achieve sustainable housing outcomes after homelessness crisis.

### Changes to intentional homelessness legislation, policy and practice

While we recognise some stakeholder concerns that IH provides an incentive for good behaviour, we failed to find evidence of it in the current study. Many of the households we spoke to had unmet support needs and were experiencing chaotic periods of their life prior to homelessness and did not realise the consequences of their actions at the time. We also acknowledge the concern that any respite on IH restrictions would undermine a household's sense of responsibility for their actions. However, we argue that assigning people to prolonged periods of homelessness and housing difficulty is not the way to instill these values and this method is simply moving the problem from one department and neighbourhood to another. Instead we suggest assisting IH households to tackle the root cause of their homelessness to instill responsibility and independence and ensure sustainable housing outcomes.

We discuss potential changes to policy, practice and legislation below in order to explore solutions to assisting IH households.

### **The private rented sector**

We think it is important that more assistance is given to IH households to access suitable, affordable housing in the PRS. This will involve closer partnership working with landlords in the sector (please see examples of good practice in Appendix 3 for more details).

The evidence in the study suggests that some IH households have to tolerate PRS accommodation of a poor standard due to a lack of accessible options. Thus it is imperative that landlord/management standards are raised in the PRS. We acknowledge that, due to the current economic climate, LAs have less time and resources for enforcement; however, we argue that ways must be sought to improve standards in the sector.

One of the problems IH households face when accessing the PRS is the inability to provide a bond or deposit in advance. Some of the LAs we spoke to stated that they provide bonds for IH

households, whereas other stated that they do not. We recommend that LAs work with RSLs and voluntary organisations to ensure that bonds can be provided for all IH households for whom the PRS is appropriate. In addition, many of the IH households we spoke to said they had difficulties accessing the PRS as landlords would not accept a paper bond. Thus we recommend investigating the feasibility of providing cash bonds to landlords.

*“Landlords just won’t take a paper bond. If the council would just change it to a cash bond then half of the homeless people would be in a flat right now” IH participant, 47, South Wales, Male*

### **Flexibility of housing options and support for intentionally homeless households**

At the heart of our findings is the belief that each IH household should be assisted to access suitable accommodation and that the accommodation options for IH households should be flexible depending on their individual needs. Supported projects are most suitable for some households while other households may be better suited to social housing or the PRS with tailored support. What is important is that potentially vulnerable IH households are not discharged from the LA housing department and then fall out of touch with housing and required support services.

One IH household stated that the IH decision actually benefited them in that they are finally receiving support for their unmet needs. This highlights that sustainable housing options involve more than putting a roof over a household’s head – it is about supporting them to be in a position to maintain their accommodation.

*“This place (supported hostel) has helped me more than the council ever did. I have never addressed my issues but I am now. I would never have been here had they not made me IH” IH participant, 53, South Wales, Male.*

We also spoke to Doug, 61, a prison leaver from North Wales who was found IH for dealing drugs from his LA property. He is currently in a private rented bedsit with his own bedroom and shared kitchen and bathroom that his project workers helped him secure. Workers at the drug project where we interviewed him stated they were having difficulty re-housing him as he is IH and they are concerned about his health. However, unlike other participants we spoke with, Doug feels he is better off in the private rented property he is in and does not seek a social tenancy. He feels his landlord is sympathetic to his needs and the location of the property is away from old associates with whom he used to get into trouble. He feels that despite the security of council accommodation, the location of the social properties is a ‘no go area’ for him if he wants to stay out of trouble. From his current location he is able to receive regular support from his drug workers who help him with day-to-day issues. Doug is an example of how homelessness accommodation solutions require flexibility in order to be tailored to individual need.

## **Reframing ‘intentional homelessness’**

We believe that all households assessed as IH should undergo a full review of their wider support needs and be fully assisted by the LA into appropriate accommodation, whether that is a supported project, a property with a RSL or suitable and affordable PRS accommodation. Through the full assessment of wider needs the housing department should work with other stakeholders to effect a full package of support to ensure that the causes of the homelessness are addressed to reduce the chances of repeat homelessness occurring. While this may appear costly in the short-term, immediate savings can be made from the reduced pressure on other statutory and voluntary services currently supporting IH households (for example, Social Services, Mental Health, Shelter Cymru, night shelters) and long-term savings can be made for both the housing department (less repeat homelessness) and the wider public purse (for example, the Criminal Justice Service, Health Services, hostels).

We understand that our vision of IH being a ‘trigger’ for support and assistance may take time to implement and deliver. Therefore, as we found evidence that being assessed as IH has a particularly negative effect for certain groups of people, we suggest IH is no longer assessed for these populations until IH becomes a way of assessing and addressing the root causes of homelessness. The groups of people who we feel IH is an unsuitable sanction for at present are:

i/ young people (under 25s). We accrued evidence that IH is an unhelpful way to classify young people. We argue that, due to lack of independent living skills and unmet support needs, young people are failing in their tenancies and being assessed as IH. Difficulties accessing the PRS (due to the restriction in SAR) plus the stigma of the IH decision is likely to impact on their future ability to secure accommodation and if accommodation and support needs are not addressed this can evolve into a cycle of repeat homelessness (see accommodation pathways section for more details), exclusion and poverty for the individual and additional costs to the public. Removing the test of intentionality for those under the age of 25 is in line with the recommendations made by the Social Justice & Regeneration Committee (2007)<sup>13</sup>.

ii/ In addition, we predict increases in homelessness following implementation of the proposed extension of SAR to under 35s (as of April 2012) as properties become less affordable. The Code of Guidance states that being unable to afford rent should not in itself be a reason for IH. Thus it is imperative that LAs pay careful consideration when assessing IH for households aged under 35s following the extension of SAR.

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<sup>13</sup> Social Justice and Regeneration Committee, Report on Youth Homelessness – “Everyone’s Business – No-one’s Responsibility”, (Welsh Assembly Government, January 2007)

iii/ The evidence we accrued in the current study suggests there is a negative effect on the dependent children of households assessed as IH. IH decisions can prolong homelessness thus the negative effects of homelessness are pronounced. The effects of this on children can be extremely detrimental including psychological distress, disrupted education and isolation from friends. We surmise that this could lead to long-term negative effects on the child's life through no fault of their own. Thus we believe that until IH is a trigger for support, households with dependent children should not be assessed for intentionality.

iv/ We found that many of the households assessed as IH are unable to secure their own stable accommodation without assistance. This is resulting in prolonged periods of homelessness and deterioration in unmet support needs such as mental health problems, substance misuse and offending behaviour. Therefore, we recommend that IH is an inappropriate sanction for households vulnerable as a result of unmet support needs.

### **The prevention of intentional homelessness**

The National Audit Office estimates that local and central government together spend about £1 billion per year on homelessness in the UK. However, research undertaken by Heriot-Watt University (2007) states that preventing homelessness can achieve direct cashable savings for local government. Nevertheless, it is imperative that a prevention/housing options approach is utilised only to develop creative solutions as opposed to using it for the gate keeping of homelessness resources. A positive of the prevention/housing options agenda for potentially homeless households is that stigma is removed as the household never becomes 'homeless'. Intervening early also allows officers more time to inspect the household's individual circumstances and develop solutions to prevent homelessness happening.

### **Education, communication and the early identification of 'at risk' households**

We have argued that, on one hand, IH is a manifestation of unmet support needs (or agency as referred to Clapham's [2002] pathways model). Therefore, prevention should work to identify 'at risk' households before proactively working with individuals to address the need before the housing crisis arises. Key principles of the prevention agenda include timely access to good quality advice assistance, consistency of advice and assistance, effective inter-agency working, early intervention and an ongoing review of policy and procedures.

*"Prevention can stop intentionality" Homelessness Officer, North Wales*

An important aspect of the prevention agenda is raising awareness of advice and information on where households should go if they experience concerns regarding their housing situation.

*“I do think it (our homelessness) could have been prevented with more help and advice from the council, especially if it was sooner. We were not aware of what assistance was available to us” IH participant, 52, South Wales, Female.*

In Scotland there is considerable emphasis on a proactive approach to delivering advice and assistance to people experiencing housing problems.

*“We have to make sure that the advice and information is out there. We can’t just sit in an office expecting people to walk in. We have to be more innovative in promotion and advertising (once alerted to a household in crisis). For us it’s about being like a dog with a bone. We don’t give up” Principal Homelessness Officer, Scotland Local Authority*

In earlier chapters we noted how young people were losing tenancies due to a lack of independent living skills. Therefore, it is imperative that all young people acquire these skills before they acquire their own tenancy. The Ten Year Homelessness Plan (2009 - 2019) suggests prevention work should begin as soon as possible in order for young people to understand the risks of homelessness and to be better prepared. Thus we recommend that core independent living skills be taught to young people in schools from an early age. One way to achieve this is by rolling independent living skills in schools via the Personal and Social Education curriculum.

*“Education is the key. There needs to be more awareness around budgeting to avoid getting into these difficulties” Homelessness Team Manager, Mid Wales*

IH often involves subjective judgements on retrospective actions and pays no recourse to what a household may now be doing to tackle the issues that led to their homelessness. We argue that this is at odds with other areas of housing law whereby changes to a person’s circumstance or behaviour are taken into consideration (for example, housing allocations and unacceptable behaviour, s.160A (8)/[s.14 (2)]). It is also inconsistent with the ethos of the Ten Year Homelessness plan (2009-2019) that argues for the need to place the service user at the heart of service delivery. A citizen centred approach should allow for service users to demonstrate the proactive changes (for example, engaging in support to address needs) they are making in their lives.

In Scotland many LAs have implemented a strong ethos of the prevention of homelessness in order to alleviate the pressure on homelessness services following changes to the legislation. A

Scottish housing officer told us that thanks to the success of their prevention work they have alleviated a lot of the increased pressure on resources and as a result could effectively deal with the implementation of the proposed changes to IH legislation.

*“Because of the success of the (LA’s) prevention agenda we could manage this amendment should it be implemented. For a number of Scottish LAs the whole drive toward 2012 [priority need target] would negate their ability to implement at this current time.” Principal Homelessness Officer, Scotland Local Authority*

Thus effective prevention can lead to less burden on homelessness departments allowing more resources to be allocated to assisting households who do go on to become IH.

Effective inter-agency working and communication is imperative for the prevention of IH and close communication between departments and services can help highlight those at risk of IH.

*“Most families at risk of an intentionality decision have ‘been through our books’” Social Services, North Wales*

A key concept of prevention in Scotland is the implementation of s.11 (duty to notify possession proceedings), which give the LA chance to get in contact with the household in advance. Thus there should be a point where no one presents to the LA with threatened homelessness without the LA knowing in advance.

*“The introduction of s.11 of the Act has been massively successful for us. It’s only been going for a year and we are getting about 400 approaches about people likely to become homeless and we have had a 100% success rate engaging with clients and not one of them have gone on to make a homelessness application. We either work with them to prevent the problem or offer housing options before it becomes a crisis” Principal Homelessness Officer, Scotland Local Authority*

For more details on good practice with regard to IH prevention in both Wales and Scotland, please see Appendix 2.

There is evidence that LA prevention schemes are effective in preventing homelessness (see Appendix 2 for more details); however, the area suffers from a lack of robust evidence at present. It is imperative that prevention policy and procedures are monitored and reviewed effectively in order to assess ‘what works for whom and when’. Effective service monitoring systems need to be designed in order to record service user outcomes and the quality of the service delivery. This could help target scarce financial resources in order to most effectively prevent IH.

## Assisting intentionally homeless households to achieve sustainable housing outcomes after homelessness crisis

We suggest that homelessness presentation is an opportunity to address a household's support needs. We hypothesise that failure to do so will result in a deterioration of issues and lead to repeat homelessness. Assessing and then addressing support needs will increase the chance of a successful tenancy in the future and savings for the housing department in the long-term.

*"If support is not given to address the issue that caused their initial eviction then the chances are that the cycle will just repeat as they will still be unprepared to maintain a tenancy like before"*  
*Landlord of temporary accommodation*

The majority of IH households we spoke to felt that their support needs were not assessed on homeless presentation at the LA.

*"They didn't do any assessment or ask if I had any wider needs" IH participant, 47, North Wales, Female*

*"All I've been told is that I've got to look for private rental" IH participant, Male, 45, South Wales*

We recommend that the first stage of achieving sustainable housing outcomes for IH households is a full assessment of housing and wider needs. We believe that all households assessed as IH should have a coordinated support package. This should involve departments other than housing and involve a commitment to monitor the household past the homelessness crisis. Such a comprehensive approach requires buy-in from RSLs, landlords in the PRS as well as statutory bodies other than housing – for example, Health, Social Services and Education.

*"There needs to be closer links with the PRS. We have nowhere to send these people - we run out of options. Our timescales are strict and things don't work in those strict timescales. There need to be schemes set up with housing associations in terms of private let"*  
*Interim accommodation manager*

Support should be dependent on the needs of the particular household and could be in the form of floating tenancy support or supported accommodation that adequately meets individual need.

*"Tenancy support even when people have lost tenancies to educate and support them into being more successful with the new tenancy." Leaving care team, North Wales*

*“We need more places like the Wallich that help out with debt and financial management in preparation for the next for the next tenancy” Homelessness Team Leader*

For details on good practice from both Wales and Scotland with regard to supporting households found IH, please see Appendix 3.

### Barriers to preventing intentional homelessness and supporting households after crisis

The research found that there were two major barriers to assisting IH households. The first was a lack of housing stock and the second was a lack of resources to offer support to all IH households. It is thought that a lack of finance underlies both of these issues. Thus there is a need for additional resources in a time when finance is most scarce.

*“Increased need for resources when budgets are shrinking” Senior Homelessness Officer North Wales*

We argue that additional investment in suitable affordable housing, and related support services (for example, Supporting People) will result in savings in the long term as both homelessness and repeat homelessness is prevented. Nevertheless, for this to happen homelessness requires increased policy attention and investment.

*“It’s all a financial thing. Homelessness is not understood by the wider public and I think the government has other priorities than our sector” Advocate, South Wales*

*“We need a plan of action to come from the top within the council. Homelessness is a corporate responsibility, it can’t just be left to the individual officers on the ground to try and improve things” Homelessness Services Officer, Mid Wales*

*“There is a lack of resources. The homeless department is not invested in” Homelessness Services Officer*

The point of presentation at the homelessness department, or ideally before, is an opportunity to instigate a coordinated approach to tackling the perceived behaviour that led to the current crisis. However, for this coordinated support to be effective, it is imperative that households are housed in stable and suitable accommodation. Further initial investment in affordable housing may lead to savings in terms of preventing deterioration of existing problems and their associated costs to society. It would also provide a base in which other support services could work to address any pertaining issues and prevent households presenting to the homelessness department in the

future. Although not having a duty to house IH households will initially relieve some of the financial burden of LAs, it is likely to be costly to housing departments in the future if the household re-presents in time and the deterioration of their initial problems means that it is no longer appropriate to deem them IH (due to recognised vulnerability). Had issues been addressed initially then the additional costs to the budgets of statutory departments, support services, society and the individual may not have been accrued.

For a rudimentary comparison of the costs of homelessness versus the costs of tackling IH, please see Appendix 5.

## Recommendations and conclusion

The application of the law on Intentional Homelessness (IH) has evolved considerably since its introduction in 1977. IH decisions are no longer restricted to those people who deliberately set out to sabotage their own tenancy in an effort to gain secure social rented accommodation, but are made in response to a wider set of circumstances relating to whether an individual intended to do something, or not do something, that led to the failure of their tenancy.

The scope of this research was not to assess whether IH decisions were being made correctly or incorrectly, but to examine the impacts of those decisions on people's lives. We found that in many cases the decision of IH caused considerable anxiety and hardship for the people concerned. The consequences of that decision reduced their accommodation options, often inadvertently excluded the household from support services, and resulted ultimately in the continuation and, in many cases, exacerbation of a cycle of unmet support needs with the long-term resource burden that this implies.

The question at the heart of the debate on IH is whether it needs to retain its punitive character – in which case necessitating a rethink of the applicability of IH decisions to people in vulnerable circumstances – or whether, in view of the economic and social consequences of denying people access to services they clearly need, it should be reframed as a trigger for support to address the root causes of homelessness. Focussing responses on the causes of homelessness is the overarching vision of the Ten Year Homelessness Plan (2009-2019)<sup>14</sup> and is clearly congruent with the latter stance above.

Our research failed to find any examples of individuals who had deliberately made themselves homeless in order to jump the queue for social housing. While we do not dispute that this may happen, we would suggest that to repeatedly make oneself deliberately homeless is a desperate act and indicative of an acute unmet support need.

Shelter Cymru proposes a proactive approach in that we believe households found IH require assistance to access appropriate support to find and sustain a suitable tenancy and to address the wider unmet needs that led to the failure of the previous tenancy. We believe that these need to be underpinned by a statutory duty on local authorities (LAs).

Our wider vision is for citizen-centred delivery of homelessness services according to need not circumstances. We want a universal service where everyone in housing need is given the

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<sup>14</sup> The Welsh Government Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales 2009-2019

assistance they require, whatever form of assistance that may be, to find a home that is right for them. The costs of providing this level of support would be offset firstly by preventing cyclical homelessness and, secondly, by allowing flexibility in the discharge of the homelessness duty. In this sense, IH would no longer be a pejorative term or a barrier to services but would activate the kind of support required to deal with the root causes of homelessness.

However, our research found that many stakeholders, particularly within LAs in Wales, believed that IH needed to remain as a sanction against households which repeatedly failed to 'take responsibility' for managing their housing circumstances. While we do not share that view, we believe it is important to stress that, if this is the response to households found IH, the Welsh Government should set a number of specific exemptions as detailed in our recommendations to ensure that only those people who are capable of falling back on to their own resources are required to do so.

We believe these exemptions should be implemented immediately as a short-term measure and should form the basis of a longer-term solution to IH that seeks to address the causes of homelessness and which, by providing the right support to find and sustain accommodation, will render the exemption of vulnerable groups unnecessary.

## Decisions

The present use of IH as a barrier to services makes it an inappropriate sanction for the following groups due to the particularly negative effect it has on these households:

- Young people under 25
- People with dependent children
- People with priority status due to vulnerability as a result of old age, mental illness, handicap or physical disability or other special reason
- In addition, we recommend that local authorities pay careful consideration to IH decisions for under 35s following the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate for Local Housing Allowance in April 2012.

## Appropriate support

The Welsh Government should establish an approach to IH that aims to address the underlying cause of the homelessness. This means:

- Placing a statutory duty on LAs to carry out a full review of wider support needs on homelessness presentation
- Placing a duty on LAs to fully assist the household into appropriate accommodation - whether that is a supported project, a property with a registered social landlord (RSL) or suitable and affordable private rented accommodation. The emphasis should be on flexible, appropriate accommodation that is dependent on individual need
- Ensuring that all households assessed as IH have a coordinated support package involving services such as health, social services and education as necessary. Support should be dependent on the needs of the particular household.

## Structure

The Welsh Government and LAs should seek to address the structural reasons for IH and the difficulties that low-income households have in accessing affordable housing. This means:

- A more ambitious target for affordable homes that meets the estimated need of over 5,000 below market homes every year
- Ensuring that the people who suffer negative impacts of the welfare reforms are not further penalised with IH decisions in the face of genuine affordability issues
- Increasing spending on housing and homelessness services, housing advice (including independent housing advice) and support, and homelessness prevention.

## The private rented sector

We recommend that the Welsh Government and LAs ensure that the private rented sector (PRS) is a viable and sustainable option for IH households.

- LAs should ensure that any property recommended to households is inspected to ensure it reaches statutory requirements under, for example, the Housing Health and Safety Rating System
  
- LAs should continue to develop partnership working with private sector landlords and should ensure that bonds can be provided for all IH households for whom the PRS is appropriate. We also recommend the feasibility of providing cash bonds is explored.
  
- The Welsh Government should investigate the feasibility of implementing recommendations from the Communities and Culture Committee's inquiry into the PRS, in particular:
  - We recommend that the Welsh Government promotes the development and use of Social Letting Agency schemes and Private Leasing Schemes by LAs
  - We recommend that the Welsh Government researches the potential effectiveness and feasibility of a mandatory licensing or registration scheme for all managers of private rented sector accommodation (including landlords) in Wales
  - We recommend that the Welsh Government takes appropriate legislative action to enable the introduction of statutory regulation of all letting agencies in Wales
  - We recommend that the Welsh Government works with LAs to develop ways of increasing tenants' knowledge of their legal rights.

## Prevention

We have argued in this report that IH often arises as a result of a failure to address a household's unmet support needs. Therefore, prevention should work to identify 'at risk' households before proactively working with individuals to address their needs before a housing crisis arises. The Welsh Government can help this to happen in the following ways:

- By making Leaving Home Education a statutory requirement in Welsh schools
- By placing a statutory duty on landlords to notify LAs of possession proceedings
- By placing a statutory duty on LAs to carry out homelessness prevention work at the earliest opportunity whenever the household presents
- By designing effective service-monitoring systems for LAs in order to record the outcomes of homelessness prevention.

# Appendix 1

## Legal context and background

The Housing Act 1996 (the Act) sets out that a person becomes homeless intentionally if he deliberately does or fails to do anything in consequence of which he loses accommodation that was available to him and reasonable for him to occupy and continue occupying.

i/ 'the applicant must deliberately have done, or failed to do something, in consequence of which he or she has ceased, or the likely result will be that he or she will have to cease occupation of accommodation which was, or is available, and

ii/ it would have been reasonable for the applicant to have continued to occupy accommodation, and

iii/ the applicant must have been aware of all the facts before deliberately taking, or failing to take, the actions referred to in i) - an act or omission in good faith on the part of someone unaware of any relevant facts is not to be regarded as deliberate.'

Further to this, sections 191(3) and 196(3) of the Act state that a person is homeless, or threatened with homelessness, intentionally if:

'he enters into an arrangement under which he is required to cease to occupy accommodation which it would have been reasonable for him to continue to occupy, the purpose of the arrangement is to enable the person to become entitled to assistance under Part 7, and there is no other good reason why the person is homeless or threatened with homelessness.'

LAs have the following duties to people who are found intentionally homeless or intentionally threatened with homelessness.

If a person is found:

- intentionally homeless and has a priority need under section 190(2) there is a 'duty to secure accommodation for such period as will give the applicant a reasonable period to secure accommodation for him/her self, and assess need and provide advice and assistance in securing accommodation.'
- intentionally homeless and does not have a priority need (s.190 (3) there is only 'a duty to assess needs and provide advice and assistance.'

If a person is:

- threatened with homelessness intentionally and has a priority need (s.195 (5)) there is 'a duty to assess needs and provide advice and assistance.'
- threatened with homelessness intentionally and is not priority need (s.195 (5)) there is 'a duty to assess needs and provide advice and assistance.'

## Appendix 2

### Research and good practice - prevention

In order to facilitate effective communication, the Scottish Government have set up five regional 'Hubs' for LAs to link in to. These information Hubs were set up in part to help authorities meet the 2012 priority need target and in part to help develop housing options models. These hubs provide a way of sharing practice and driving up performance. There is also a fund available for staff training and innovation.

*“ We have radically changed the delivery of service. It was decentralised and now it's centralised. We have also invested a lot in training and analysed our approaches. For example, we found that only 3% of those who approached for advice went on to make a homelessness presentation, whereas 97% of those who approached the homelessness section went on to make a presentation. We also have a common allocation policy with all RSLs” Principal Homelessness Officer, Scottish Local Authority*

Rosengard et al (2006) reported evidence of good practice in terms of homelessness prevention in Scotland. This includes: a one-stop homelessness advice service where case workers can consult social workers, mental health officers and a psychiatric nurse for information; a dedicated housing education post to identify and address the educational needs of service users as well as an 'education forum' where service users can discuss ways of meeting their needs and a schools education programme to raise awareness of leaving home issues; a multi-agency youth liaison group bringing together staff from housing, social work, a housing association and the voluntary sector; and the development of joint protocols around families who have been evicted, looked after children, anti-social behaviour and rent arrears. This includes increased joint working between LAs and RSLs on section 5 protocols (under the 2001 Act) as well as between RSLs as landlords and voluntary organisations providing support services.

We found evidence of good practice regarding prevention and consistency in Wales from Flintshire LA. The housing department have a new team in order to provide more continuity for people experiencing homelessness. The same four officers deal with applicants right through from the prevention programme (there is a focus on homelessness prevention), to decision making to discharge of duty. An LA officer told us that if a risk of IH is identified then the team looks at what support is needed for the household to prevent the homelessness. Due to this being a pilot scheme there is currently no data on the success of this scheme.

The current research identified that some IH households have a degree of support need. An essential element of the prevention agenda is to address underlying support needs before they result in homelessness or, more specifically, IH when support and assistance is severely reduced. The support offered will depend on the needs of the particular household or family. In Scotland, some chaotic families are referred to a family project in order to try to prevent homelessness:

*“In Shelter Scotland we have had 3 or 4 family projects. These have worked with people who have had multiple tenancy failures and repeat homelessness. Families would be referred on the basis of chaotic lifestyle problems. All the things we are dealing with in the project are things that down the line could lead to an IH decision, behaviour, addiction, rent arrears, debt, child care issues etc”*  
*Shelter Scotland*

An example of effective joint working for families in Wales is the ‘Swansea Family Intervention Project’. The Welsh Assembly Government Social Housing Management Grant programme, the local authority Supporting People team and Swansea Youth Offending Service fund the project. This project works with families under threat of eviction or other legal sanction related to their alleged anti-social behaviour. The project takes a ‘twin-track’ approach using both support and enforcement. Finally, we spoke to a number of IH households who were receiving valued support from the Save the Family project, which provides emotional and practical support for homeless families.

For households at risk of IH due to behavioural issues, projects such as Shelter Cymru’s Valleys Inclusion Project (VIP) could help address the underlying cause. The VIP is a specialist project providing floating support to households who are at risk of homelessness as a result of allegations of anti-social behaviour (‘ASB’). The principle underpinning the work of the VIP is that ASB is often the result of unmet support needs and that many alleged perpetrators are themselves vulnerable and socially excluded. The VIP is funded by the Big Lottery Fund, Caerphilly County Borough Council and the Welsh Government and covers the county boroughs of Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf. The latest evaluation of the VIP, undertaken in October 2010, found that there had been a 100% reduction or cessation of ASB amongst client households whose cases had been closed and that homelessness had been prevented in 80% of the households whose cases had been closed. There was also evidence of improved participation by households within their local communities.

During the research we found that households were becoming IH following placement in temporary accommodation that is unsuitable given their support needs. Matching the client’s needs to the temporary accommodation could reduce the incidences of potentially vulnerable people being deemed IH. The housing department has a duty to provide accommodation without specifics.

However, if the household was matched with a specific project to meet their needs then the cycle of homelessness may be reduced.

*“I’d like to see more communication from the council. If they have a duty and they haven’t got a project suitable then perhaps we could look to having them on the floor space of my service for a week with the aim of putting them in a project that is suitable for them. This will encourage a positive move on as opposed to putting them in a project that is not right and two days later they come back to my service and have lost any duty the council have to them” Emergency Bed Coordinator*

Pawson et al. (2007)<sup>15</sup> reported that in Scotland, even though the statistical data on the effectiveness of housing advice services is somewhat scarce, more than a quarter of housing advice service users at risk of homelessness were housed as an immediate outcome of their contact with advice staff. Of the 26 households logged as 'homelessness prevention service users', approximately 50% viewed the LA intervention as having resolved their housing problems and only two said that intervention had definitely not helped in this way (Pawson et al., 2007).

Almost all of the LAs in Scotland operate a rent deposit guarantee scheme to assist homeless people to access private tenancies (they provide financial support as well as services to help users find and, on occasion, retain tenancies). The schemes are mainly targeted on non-priority households but some have accommodated IH households. Despite their use being somewhat underreported, the national homelessness monitoring data suggests the activity of such schemes is relatively small scale (Pawson et al., 2007). Nevertheless, service users have reported positive experiences with the scheme. Importantly, Pawson et al. (2007) note that many of the schemes users appeared to lack the knowledge, confidence and finances to have accessed a private tenancy unaided.

Many LAs in Scotland cite the largest scale and most effective form of homelessness prevention was support for vulnerable people to retain their tenancies (Pawson et al., 2007). This means of support involves debt counselling to help prevent eviction due to rent arrears. There is also assistance for budgeting, welfare benefits, self-esteem and employment. Service users can also be referred to specialist services for help with issues such as mental health, drug addiction and parenting skills. Pawson et al. (2007) states that monitoring the success of tenancy support schemes is particularly difficult, despite Scottish LAs citing this as the ‘most effective’ form of prevention’. Thus Pawson et al. suggest a need to monitor the proportion of service user tenancies

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<sup>15</sup> Pawson, H., Netto, G., Jones, C., Wager, F., Fancy, C. and Lomax, D. (2007) *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*; Department for Communities & Local Government website

sustained in the period following their engagement with the service. Given that such schemes can be staff intensive it is imperative that effective monitoring and cost benefit analysis is undertaken.

Recent research into the housing and related support needs of young vulnerable people in Torfaen (Campbell et al., in press) revealed many examples of support young people felt helped them to maintain their tenancies. This included: effective emotional and mental health support; assistance with substance misuse and help with accessing benefits and budgeting.

## Appendix 3

### Research and good practice – supporting IH households

During the course of the research we spoke to several Welsh LA staff from the housing department who told us about provision for IH households in their LA area. There was no consistent approach to providing advice and assistance in securing accommodation across LAs. Some LAs stated that due to low resources there was not much in the way of support they could offer other than providing information on the PRS and where households might receive assistance with bonds. When available, support varied with some LAs helping with paper bonds (we generally found there was a limited budget for cash bonds) on occasion, use of prevention fund monies to provide assistance such as rent in advance or an incentive for a landlord linking in with housing options and housing register teams, practical assistance such as photocopying adverts, or referrals to Social Services or Supporting People. However, as noted earlier in this report, many IH households stated they received no support at all and the support they did receive did not necessarily help them to obtain accommodation.

A good example of partnership working to support homeless households into sustainable housing outcomes is Agorfa. Agorfa initially operated as a bond scheme, working with the PRS since 1998. They developed the social lettings agency, Cefni Lettings, with Welsh Government funding in 2008. They have established 1250 tenancies since 2007, working with 350 landlords. The scheme is now operating in five counties: Ynys Mon, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire and Powys. Cefni are responsible for linking residents with a range of support services depending on individual needs.

A further example of good practice in assisting households to obtain accommodation is Carmarthenshire LA. Carmarthenshire award IH households the second highest band (Category B) on their social housing allocation policy and households are deemed as 'High Housing Need'. This greatly increases the chances of IH households obtaining permanent social housing.

There is evidence of good practice with regard to supporting IH households in Scotland. Rosengard et al. (2006) examined models and patterns of support provision for IH households and found that LAs and other housing providers are increasingly using combinations of floating support and supported housing services for this population. The Supporting People grant is a key funding source for supporting homeless people in Scotland. Other funding sources include: Social Work and Health funding; Social Work funding; LA general funds; 'Top up' funding by the voluntary service provider; housing benefit and the service user; Supporting People grant as well as s10 funding and housing benefit (voluntary sector hostel); Hostel Support Grant and RSI funding.

At present, the support offered to Scottish IH households is dependent on the particular needs of the household and on the support options available in the area. There is variation in IH households' access to floating support/ tenancy support services. Some LAs routinely offer support to all homeless households through their tenancy support scheme, some receive support subject to assessment and current living arrangements and other LAs do not provide such support as a matter of course although users may access support through other avenues such as social work assessments. In sum, policy, practice and funding differences jointly and variably influence local patterns of rationing access to support and accommodation for IH households in Scotland.

As noted, current provision for Scottish IH households varies across LAs. We explored the rationale behind providing support for IH households with one representative:

*“Whilst not instructed to provide support for IH households, we take the view that this is often the most chaotic, vulnerable group and therefore support must be offered, especially where there are children. Every homeless household undertakes a matrix support assessment with an inter-agency response as appropriate; the more complex cases have an intensive support package that follows them beyond homelessness. Many have reached their lowest ebb by the point of reaching homelessness and therefore there is a need to assist households to move back up and on with the assistance to secure alternative housing and provide appropriate support” Principal Homelessness Officer, Scotland Local Authority*

The same Scottish LA representative explained to us how the individual circumstances of the IH household are assessed before accommodation and support provided. Thus the LA would not place a family or someone vulnerable in the PRS, rather it may be more appropriate to place the household in a managed environment in social housing where they would consider a Scottish Shorthold tenancy with a comprehensive support plan. Young people tend to go into intensively supported accommodation and families into dispersed furnished accommodation. Their in house tenancy support scheme and rent guarantee/deposit scheme helps IH households access the private rented sector where appropriate. They make approximately 300 lettings a year through their rent deposit scheme and the LA negotiates with landlords to take on clients landlords may have otherwise been reluctant to. They offer the landlord a guarantee and state that there is a full package of support in place. Housing officers monitor the tenancy and provide a point of contact for the landlord.

*“IH households have reached a stage of crisis often beyond other homeless households and as such this needs to be identified and responded to with appropriate support and outcomes based on individual need.” Principal Homelessness Officer, Scotland Local Authority*

In terms of tackling complex needs, Rankin and Regan (2004)<sup>16</sup> (cited in Rosengard et al., 2006) proposed two models based on partnership working. The first model is 'Connected Care Centres' and is underpinned by community development and partnership approaches. These are community based 24 hours services to prevent and respond to those with complex needs. Clients can self-refer and local residents are involved in the planning and managing of the service including linking in clients to appropriate support services. Actual services will depend on local need however is likely to involve: a single point of entry; co-location of a variety of service providers from health, social care and the voluntary sector; links to relevant services; procedures for information sharing; and managed transitions and continued support.

The second model is a 'service navigator' or 'service adviser' approach. This involves a lead professional who works with the service user to identify and develop a sustainable accommodation and pathway. The role would have a wide remit and would require the lead worker to have knowledge of a wide ranging spectrum of problems and how they interconnect – for example, housing, benefits, employment law, cultural impacts, offending and homelessness issues.

### Engagement in support

An important element of addressing underlying needs is ensuring that the household engages with the provided support. Some stakeholders we spoke to expressed concerns that support is offered to some IH households, however they fail to engage.

*"It's not just about prevention. Some people leave it too long to seek help and then do not engage in support" Resettlement Worker*

Clapham (2003) notes that homeless people may be offered different kinds of services -including accommodation and support- and the particular 'discourse' (meaning) associated with the accommodation and support may influence the way the homeless person reacts to it. For example, some people may find hostel accommodation at odds with their conception of the idea of 'home', or find hostels frightening or intimidating and may not want to engage with a service that offers support through this medium - instead preferring to sleep rough on the street. Hutson (1999<sup>17</sup>, as cited in Clapham, 2003) argues that many forms of accommodation and support for homeless people are based on professional definitions of 'need' as opposed to the needs defined by the service user themselves. Thus discourses can affect the take up and engagement in accommodation and support interventions designed to 'deal with' homelessness. Thus services

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<sup>16</sup> Rankin, J. and Regan, S. (2004). *Meeting Complex Needs: The Future of Social Care*, London: Turning Points IPPR.

<sup>17</sup> Hutson, S. (1999). The experience of 'homeless' accommodation and support. In S. Hutson, & D. Clapham (Eds.), *Homelessness: Public policies and private troubles* (pp. 208–225). London: Cassell.

should be designed around the needs of the service user and be concurrent with their own personal goals, wishes and hopes. Involving and consulting service users in the strategic planning of services is now recognised good practice (Rosengard et al., 2006).

Flexibility of support delivery is also an important element of increasing service user engagement. Rosengard et al (2006) reported on a personalised and flexible assertive outreach voluntary sector housing support service for people who are traditionally difficult to engage in support. The service supports 160 clients and is funded by Supporting People. It works with clients who exhibit difficult behaviour or clients who are vulnerable (for example, those at risk of domestic violence or those with clinical depression). It offers emotional and practical support including assistance communicating with the housing department. Clients can be linked in with specialist housing support services such as services specifically for young people or people with mental health problems. As part of this model clients' needs are reviewed quarterly to ensure service delivered is most appropriate.

It is essential that the support on offer is of good quality and appropriate to the needs of the household. Some stakeholders view a lack of client engagement as a result of inflexibility and inappropriateness in the service response (Rosengard et al., 2006) as opposed to a client shortcoming. This indicates that non-engagement may be a product of structural issues as opposed to, or in conjunction with, individual agency factors. Flexible support requires movement at the household's pace, in a manner appropriate to them and a worker acceptance of clients disengaging with support for a period of time without 'shutting the door' (Rosengard et al. 2006).

## Appendix 4

### The cost of prevention versus the cost of homelessness

The argument for additional investment in prevention (of initial or repeat homelessness) resources comes from various studies that highlight the case for 'spending to save'.

Evidence during a 2007 Shelter Cymru VIP evaluation indicated that the project operated below the level of costs generated by tenancy breakdown caused by anti-social behaviour. In addition, once the longer term benefits for the service user and their community are considered the benefits of the VIP outweighed the costs (Colquhoun & Thomas, 2007<sup>18</sup>).

It has not been possible to conduct a robust cost-benefit analysis during the current study due to lack of directly comparable data between the costs of intentional homelessness in our study and what it would have cost to prevent each case of homelessness. Nevertheless, it may be advantageous to present the unit costs associated with some of the cases of homelessness we witnessed during the research. Kenway & Palmer (2003)<sup>19</sup> attempted to quantify the costs that might be saved by reducing homelessness. They did this by looking at the estimates of the unit costs associated with particular incidents that arise in connection with homelessness. These are the cited costs that usually fall on the public, private and voluntary sector.

1. **Possession order and eviction warrant (per episode)** - £200. Our research found evidence of repeat homelessness and repeat evictions from numerous households
2. **Hostel (per week)** - £300<sup>20</sup>. We found evidence of both long-term and repeat hostel use for a number of our participants
3. **Bed and breakfast (per week)** - £150 – There was evidence of B&B use in our study.
4. **Costs to the Health Service** - services used after minor wounding – proxy for A&E visit (per incident) - £150. Services used after serious wounding – proxy for hospitalisation (per incident) - £6,400 – There was evidence of increased use of health services in our study, especially for those who had incidents of rough sleeping following the IH decision.

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<sup>18</sup> Colquhoun, T. and Thomas, M. (2007). Valleys Inclusion Project – final evaluation.

<sup>19</sup> Kenway, P and Palmer G. (2003) HOW MANY, HOW MUCH? Single homelessness and the question of numbers and cost. A Crisis report

<sup>20</sup> However, Shelter Cymru and Homeless Link Cymru (2004) estimated, based on figures supplied by a number of Welsh LAs that the actual costs of placing two adults and one child could be up to £490 per week.

5. **Treatment for mental ill-health (per episode)** - £6,000 – We saw evidence of a marked deterioration in mental health following IH decision for a number of households. These sentiments were echoed by numerous stakeholders who highlighted the additional costs to mental health services following an IH decision.
6. **Costs to the criminal justice system - police and courts (per incident)** – ranging from £1450 (minor wounding) - £14,500 (major wounding) – local prison (per week) - £500 – We found that IH decisions can result in an increase in re-offending and additional use of the criminal justice system.
7. **Lost output via unemployment (per week)** - £230 – We found that IH decisions can have a considerably negative effect on employment. Many of the IH households we spoke to were not currently in employment.

Thus although it has not been possible to accurately assess the costs IH in the current study, the above costs highlight the considerable financial costs that IH decisions can have to both statutory and voluntary services.

We noted earlier that there is a paucity of robust data on the effectiveness of many homelessness prevention schemes. However, indicators suggest that such preventative intervention can be effective in preventing homelessness (or repeat homelessness) and thus many of the costs above can be avoided. Rosengard et al.'s (2006) calculated the costs of various homelessness prevention methods and reported them as follows:

- The cost of providing housing information, advice plus assessment to address needs varied per applicant from £82 to £145 in urban areas and from £219 to £620 in rural and island areas.
- The costs of supported accommodation between £150 and £300 per person per week with Supporting People housing support costs between £100 and £600 per week. However, the costs associated with Supporting People services are lower for single homeless people in settled accommodation compared to Supporting People Services for single homeless people in temporary accommodation<sup>21</sup>
- Rent deposit/guarantee schemes generally provide average advance rent per tenancy of £343.

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<sup>21</sup> (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1274439>)

- Floating support costs varied in response to particular and changing needs. Hourly costs for relatively low-level support were between £14 to £15 per hour with weekly. In some areas the costs of Supporting People were identified as ranging from £8 to £37 per person per hour.
- A Families Support service was quoted as approximately £27 per hour with low support (up to 5 hours a week) or medium level support (between 5 and 20 hours a week) depending on individual households' needs.
- Assertive outreach services for those with complex needs could provide short, medium (5-20 hours per week) or high level (20 plus hours per week if a wrap around service is required) support. They estimate this at approximately £27 an hour.

We suggest that if identified early enough, some IH household's homelessness could be prevented by the relatively cheap intervention of access to timely information and advice and a degree of low-level support to address any underlying support needs. The costs of this intervention are likely to be recouped by the avoidance of repossession, temporary accommodation and any other costs incurred by homelessness. It is likely that a considerable number of IH households may require more intensive support over a longer period of time. However, again, this cost would be recouped by the avoidance of not only the costs of homelessness but savings to other sectors as these vulnerable people are likely to become more chaotic and experience repeat homelessness if their support issues are not addressed.

The above argument relates solely to the 'hard', quantifiable financial costs to services. However, there are numerous immeasurable costs that are likely to be accrued to society and, importantly, the household as a result of IH decisions. The above does not include less quantifiable costs such as the long-term effects on children, for example, which are likely to be far reaching.

We recommend that there is a comprehensive impact assessment of the resources and services required to deliver the prevention and support recommendations in this report.