

Reducing the number of people 'falling out' of the Housing Wales Act 2014: Rhondda Cynon Taff

Welsh Oak Foundation funded Local Authority (LA)
project to support the identification and development of
local solutions to reduce the number of people 'falling
out' of the Housing Wales Act (HWA) 2014

Crisis UK

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Introduction and background to the project

Previous Oak Foundation funded research highlighted that there was considerable variance between LAs in Wales as to the percentage of households who “fell out” of the statutory homelessness system in Wales.

Within the overall caseloads of people seen (pre-project, 2019), the fall out rates ranged from 8% to 29%, with an average of 15.5% across the 22 LAs in Wales¹. However, there was not one single issue or group of issues which explained the variation.

The Oak Foundation wanted to work with a small number of Welsh LAs to:

- Explore and understand at a local level the unique factors, issues and processes, which were leading to people falling out of the HWA and
- Develop realistic action plans, to test service changes which were tailored to the local context, with an aim to reduce the percentage of people falling out of the HWA, within each LA area.

From February 2021 until March 2023, Crisis, funded by the Oak Foundation, worked with three Welsh LAs; Rhondda Cynon Taff, Ceredigion and Caerphilly, to consider how services could be redesigned to reduce the number of customers falling out of the statutory housing system within S66 (prevention) and S73 (relief) of the HWA 2014.

We are using the term ‘fall out’ to describe the combined group of people who are recorded as:

- Assistance refused
- Non co-operation
- Application withdrawn
- Application withdrawn due to loss of contact
- Other reasons

The project was devised and commissioned pre Covid-19, and the ‘fall out’ considered spanned pre and post pandemic years, which are both very different landscapes. During this time, the Welsh Government’s response to provide everyone in need with accommodation was actioned and additional legislative changes were also brought in during the lifetime of the project.

¹ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/householdsforwhichassistancehasbeenprovided-by-outcome-householdtype>

Main aims of the project

- Increase successful prevention and relief outcomes for people currently falling out of the statutory homelessness system in Wales, and those who may do so in the future; helping to eliminate repeat homelessness and its associated costs.
- Work through specific factors that contribute to people falling out, including wider service improvements and development support in an open, collaborative environment.
- Gain insight from service users who will share their experiences as part of the project.

Key Assumptions, Risks, and Dependencies at commencement of project

- Covid 19 and the impact of 'Everyone In' would affect the figures relating to 'fall out' for the period since March 2020.
- Covid 19 may affect the delivery of the project as onsite workshops and other activities such as audits etc may have to be carried out remotely.
- Covid 19 may affect the number of staff available to participate in the project both from the local authority and Crisis.
- Covid 19 and the difficulty of reaching people who have 'fallen out' of the system may affect the number of service users available to contribute and become involved in the project.
- Considerations also needed to ensure that the solutions provided will be suitable in the post-pandemic environment.

Project management approach

- Allow projects to develop throughout their lifecycle.
- Work iteratively and focus on finding the best solution to fit the unique circumstances for the LA area.
- Collaboration was at the heart of the work, and we prioritised clear and continuous communication through the project's lifespan.
- Share learning and encourage others to use any project materials made available through the Crisis website.
- The project required both strategic and front-line delivery staff involvement to ensure that we had all the relevant knowledge available from which the project could benefit.
- We understood the need for the project to be adaptable and flexible, to fit around each department's existing commitments and we tried to break the work up into small manageable increments.

- As the project was being delivered during the pandemic, we worked in an agile way. Using tools, digital workspaces and collaborative platforms where documents could be remotely shared and worked on together.

Project detail

Each LA received free, targeted support from Crisis, who gathered evidence to gain insight into the current and past rates of “fall out” from the statutory homelessness process.

The knowledge gained from this process informed workshops and other collaborative processes where idea transfer, problem solving, and solution development took place.

Once the project moved into the solution development phase, more detailed planning and actions took place.

Quick wins and design opportunities were developed for each LA in the form of an action plan. Crisis helped the project team to develop a series of concepts and prototype documents for each of the priority areas that the LAs wanted to focus on.

Following the completion of the project, Crisis continued to be involved in monitoring progress against the action plans, collecting data regarding fall out rates, evaluating the effectiveness of solutions implemented, and collating additional feedback from the project teams.

A range of meetings took place throughout the project including regular catch ups with the team leads, regular scheduled meetings with the whole project team, and quarterly strategic meetings with LA leads. The Oak Foundation also led a steering group meeting approximately every six weeks, where progress reports were submitted.

Shelter Cymru and the Take Notice project were commissioned to carry out peer support interviews with LA customers who had their duty ended under one of the five fall out categories detailed above. However, for a range of reasons direct peer to peer research was unable to take place, and a report was compiled by Shelter Cymru using their own ‘Sentinel’ database of previous casework clients, identifying households that would have been in scope for the project. ²

² Copy of the Shelter Cymru report sent alongside this report to Rhondda Cynon Taff

Summary of key reasons for fall-out identified by the project work

- Accommodation did not always meet needs – some temporary accommodation had particularly high fall-out rates - little evidence of suitability checks even when clear evidence of customer circumstances on files e.g. Health, family connections, schools etc. Supply issues and lack of suitable move-on accommodation identified in all areas causing lengthy stays in sometimes unsuitable temporary or supported accommodation.
- Limited time to conduct quality casework links to fall-out identified (small sample studied) - a large proportion of past fallouts showed poor scores across casework in an audit. No evidence of casework standards to adhere to. Likely high caseload implications.
- Reasonable steps by Council lacking in casework – few or generic steps identified could contribute to potential breakdown in relationship between customer and council together with use of "support worker" model in some areas, leading to council having little direct contact with customer.
- Progressing customers along the homelessness journey effectively could be improved – much better engagement and progression seen in initial phases of the process. Some cases showed little or no contact following assessment to close of file with little evidence of a selection of contact methods being used.
- Letters and communications with customers were lengthy and confusing. In some cases, communications with partners organisations could be strengthened to provide a stronger "safety net" for customers.

Comparative findings to the [Public Services Ombudsman for Wales -Homelessness Reviewed: an open door to positive change report 2021:](#)

- Letters and PHPs too generic, not personalised enough, too technical and difficult to understand
- Guidance around classification of case closure outcomes not clear
- No system in place to inform officers how frequently they should contact customers during casework or when closing files – casework standards
- Could have wider range and improve use of tech to communicate with customers – more streamlined customer contact journey
- Lack of simple, straightforward information available for customers and partners – websites out of date – could increase and improve self-help opportunities.

Rhondda Cynon Taff's planned actions

The results of the discovery phase, development of potential solutions and actions taken for Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) are documented in this review.

The onboarding work with RCT commenced in Feb 21, and as the project commenced during the pandemic, all initial meetings and workshops were carried out remotely.³

The design opportunities drawn from the workshops at the discovery phase were:

Quick Wins

1. How might we use our temporary accommodation as a platform for positive, sustainable outcomes?
2. How might we provide continuity and clarity of support for members?
3. How might we increase proactive engagement between client and caseworker?
4. How might we proactively prevent homelessness?
5. How might we assess support needs and improve our offer of support?

Below, we describe each design opportunity in turn, how it was implemented, and staff reflections on what difference it made.

When there has been duplication or cross-over of concepts, the same concept features under different design opportunities.

³ RCT project report has been sent to RCT alongside this report and contains more detailed information of the project work undertaken with RCT, which covers the following areas: Approach and methodology, Discovery goals and activities, Insights gained, Quick wins and design opportunities, Concepts and prototypes, Action plan, Evaluation and monitoring and National Policy implications.

Quick wins

Quick wins were identified as tasks that teams could try to complete within the first eight weeks of the project with some effort, design, and consultation).

Concepts developed under this design opportunity	
Review Personal Housing Plans (PHPs) - make more customer friendly	Casework standards
Introduce case management standards	Update procedure on ending duty categories
Updating of preferred contact methods	Convey likely current service outcomes to customers
Progress highlights	
<p>The actions taken here were taking steps towards improving customer relationships, awareness, and understanding of housing-related matters in RCT. It was hoped that they could improve the customer experience by creating more open and friendly relationships, keeping customers informed, and increasing customer knowledge. This in turn would mean that customers would be able to make more informed choices and help keep customers in the system, making opportunities for intervention and patterns of fall-out more identifiable.</p> <p>All actions linked to casework standards and practices were linked to ongoing reviews and service redesigns. To support these changes and improve casework standards a team Operational manual and a Prevention Operational manual was developed for internal and external teams, which aligned to the revised service delivery model.</p> <p>Housing and Homefinder web pages were updated, and an information leaflet was created to inform customers of key information in relation to housing supply and demand, accessing the private rented sector, and temporary accommodation. Additional fact sheets were produced alongside Shelter Cymru and discussions had taken place with providers to help them manage customer and staff expectations.</p>	

Staff reflections

Staff reported that some of the initial steps taken under 'Quick Wins' were already having an impact. With one respondent stating that:

'There has been a significant increase in our prevention rates, and I feel this is assisted by managing expectations and the current situation regarding housing. With clear messaging going to applicants, I feel this helps them understand better and take up the options we have available to them'

Design opportunity 1:

How might we use our temporary accommodation (TA) as a platform for positive, sustainable outcomes?

Concepts developed under this design opportunity	
Increase the provision of temporary accommodation we need	Review the tech used / methods used to communicate with customers
Bring elected members on board (Design Opportunity 2)	Complex needs supported housing/housing first provision?
Management process and standards	Regular feedback from TA providers.

Progress highlights
<p>At commencement of project all TA had support workers from different providers, and feedback was gained from providers separately. By the end of the project a new TA pathway had commenced, all support provision had been taken in house and a new TA data collection system was developed to enable a more comprehensive overview of TA situation.</p> <p>It was anticipated that all forms of communication between providers, resident, and support team will improve once the new pathway embedded.</p> <p>A Housing First Project Officer was recruited to carry out a full review of all aspects of Housing First (HF) provision, and to develop a new single person's pathway which also included a redesign of support provision.</p> <p>However, allocations and access to properties for HF residents was still a challenge and supply was a major barrier to progress, but both supply and allocations reviews were going to be a post project focus.</p>

Staff reflections
<p>Staff reported that they were optimistic that these actions were helping prevent fallout. One stated in the feedback survey that:</p> <p><i>'Some of the reduction [in fallout] has come from specific support work such as the Housing First project'</i></p> <p><i>'A review of Housing First arrangements has streamlined [the] process for all partners[,] with clearer arrangements in place...'</i></p>

'New support arrangements have ... had an impact on numbers being placed in TA and better outcomes for the client which include being offered a supported accommodation placement with 24/7 support'

'Our biggest drop-out rate remains offenders, this cohort will link in due course with the review of our support pathway'.

However, one member of staff believed that the actions around TA were unlikely to reduce fallout substantially:

'I feel that there has been no change, mainly due to the clients that we deal with who access TA. Primarily these are single applicants with offence backgrounds who may be re-called to Prison or find other accommodation and do not notify us of this'.

Design Opportunity 2:

How might we provide continuity and clarity of support for customers?

Concepts developed under this design opportunity	
Consolidate case management system	Better working with Shelter Cymru
Reinvigorate partnership working	Core identified support team
Reinvigorate attendance at partnership forums (Quick Wins)	Review pathways to increase client engagement (Design Opportunity 3)
Bring debt workers in-house	Consider restructure of staffing (Design Opportunity 5)
Add a financial inclusion officer and review the CAB offer (Design Opportunity 4)	Consider bringing some support services in-house (Design Opportunity 5)
Review Debt Pathway (Quick Win)	Virtual physical multi-agency hub
Progress highlights	
<p>This action was about providing a service that increased positive and informative contact in a range of different ways, with the aim of building trusting and positive relationships to help reduce the number of people leaving the system with a "fall out" outcome.</p> <p>RCT used and are using data more effectively to understand better where people may have been falling out of the system and help support service planning and redesign to reduce fall out rates.</p> <p>Partnerships are a key part of service provision in RCT, and efforts are made to maintain and enhance these to improve communication and service provision for customers.</p> <p>RCT were innovative in their use of Welsh Government (WG) pandemic support grants and employed two new Project Officers to review current single person pathway provision, scope out and develop a set of new service specifications to meet the challenges of increased presentations, to increase the level of support provision for complex needs customers, and reduce the numbers of people falling out of the system because of unmet needs.</p> <p>Changes introduced during this phase of work included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Pathways: Prevention and Single Persons (includes HF, prison leaver) • Support: TA support taken in house, and health outreach provided in TA and in supported accommodation. Financial and debt support pathways 	

with the CAB were reinvigorated, and awareness raising sessions took place both internally and externally.

- Partnerships: Housing Support Officer co-locating with the Probation service team for one day a week, and fortnightly meetings were taking place with a Shelter Cymru Officer every two weeks to discuss relevant casework and a learning exchange.

Staff reflections

In relation to the development of new pathways and their effects on fall out rates some staff commenting that:

'... It is a journey, but I feel already we are making a difference to customers who have more understanding of their homelessness journey and our duties to them. The process has also improved communication between officers and staff who themselves hopefully are clearer on the process.'

'The specialist health team are now working with people who are struggling with their mental health and substance misuse so that they are more likely to stay in their TA placement rather than leaving and reverting back to sofa surfing as they are getting the support that they need at their placement.'

Design Opportunity 3:

How might we increase proactive engagement between client and caseworker?

Concepts developed under this design opportunity	
Review officer caseloads	Agile working
Consider Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) approaches	Review ways for customers to be able to communicate with us
Progress highlights	
<p>This action was about giving time and creating an environment that enabled a stronger more trusting relationship to be developed between customer and Officers. By making this process simpler and easier to achieve, it would help reduce customers leaving the system with a fall out outcome.</p> <p>Staff monitored the numbers of clients returning or wanting face to face meetings and offered face to face meetings to enable staff to get to know customers and understand their needs in a more holistic way.</p> <p>There was also a focus on trying to provide person centred wrap around support and engagement with high-risk prevention cases aiming to reduce fall out due to loss of contact.</p> <p>Partner service specifications were also clear about designing and delivering more person centred psychologically informed services.</p>	

Staff reflections
<p>While it was not clear whether this would go on to affect fallout rates, the Team Lead was optimistic:</p> <p><i>'Attendance at Service by clients remains lower than anticipated but staff team encouraged to make more effective use of office spaces and face to face client contact, in particular to support effective case assessment'</i></p> <p>A more general comment from a staff member around this theme was:</p> <p><i>'Changes in services and staff can have an impact of the client group that we deal with, and continuity is key to prevent this fallout.'</i></p>

Design Opportunity 4:

How might we proactively prevent homelessness?

Concepts developed under this design opportunity	
Check how much unreported work happens	Increase the reach, frequency and/or effectiveness of existing prevention workshops
Devise a framework for monitoring prevention	Increase the amount of joint across disciplines
Monitor effectiveness of prevention offer	Partner Prevention workshops (Quick Win)
Review Prevention offer	

Progress highlights

RCT wanted to improve the prevention offer and stem the flow of new customers into the system to help reduce fall-out rates. Less customers in the system means more time for caseworkers to effectively work on cases and less stress on the system in general.

New prevention monitoring systems were set up to allow data and trends to be more visible and these were being frequently monitored to evidence who was coming into and falling out of the system, and to be able to see when services may not be meeting people's needs.

It was hoped that this would help to identify fallout and potential risk of homelessness and that there would also be a reduction in undetected prevention activity, as the new pathways, processes and ways of monitoring would help with early identification and monitor progress of cases more effectively.

Staff reflections

In relation to the initial review of prevention activities, a respondent to the survey after Q1 believed this work was having an impact but stated that *'I think this is still a work in progress'*.

The Team Lead reported that they saw the potential in reducing fallout once the new single person assessment pathway was in place after the end of the project, by reducing pressure on the Housing Support Officers and allowing them to concentrate on prevention options.

After the first quarter, the Team Lead reported that they had observed a:

'... significant improvement prevention outcomes following the workshops and review of existing work process... Whilst prevention options remain limited due to current housing market conditions, the HSO team are maximising options wherever possible. Successful prevention outcome rate for Qtr. 1 2022-23 = 80% v 48% at Qtr. 1 2021/22.'

Design Opportunity 5

How might we assess support needs and improve our offer of support?

Concepts developed under this design opportunity	
Consider models of support from other local authorities	Develop system for capturing support needs from all customers
Evaluate existing data around support needs	Develop systems to work more closely with MH and drug and alcohol teams
Progress highlights	
<p>Data sets from across different services, such as TA, HF, floating support and the outreach health team had been amalgamated, which meant that more information was available and was reviewed regularly.</p> <p>New monitoring systems were set up to capture data from the new pathways that had been developed. More effective TA data was being collected alongside information regarding support needs and access to services such as outreach health support</p> <p>This updated form of data collection contributed to the development of the new pathways and RCT are keen to keep improving on data collection and using data to increase prevention activities, reduce stays in TA, and fall out rates, alongside informing future service development.</p> <p>A community care support pilot was due to take place post project. They would be joined by substance misuse and mental health consultant psychiatrists, who will be working together to support people with complex needs.</p> <p>Although the multi-disciplinary team was not fully funded or employed by RCT LA, RCT residents would all benefit from the new services that had been developed. Data sets would be scrutinised more regularly to monitor services provision, alongside whether fall out rates would reduce due to these additional support services.</p>	

New initiatives in the pipeline

a) Fall out rates

Following this project RCT are keen to apply an increased focus and drilling down into why people are falling out of the homelessness system. With RCT constantly monitoring and looking at what the data is saying, it will be especially interesting to see what effect the new pathways and process have once embedded.

b) Domestic abuse interventions

As part of the new prevention pathway RCT will be working with domestic abuse services to review provision. There will be a review of refuge provision, a drive to reduce the use of TA (where safe to do so) and increase and improve target hardening. They hope to develop six new units of step-down refuge accommodation and already have IRIS projects in GP surgeries, health IDVAs based within hospital, and HF teams. RCT have also received additional research funding from the WG Prosperity Fund to increase understanding in a local context, as instances of domestic abuse have risen sharply specifically in some areas.

c) Public Health Wales research project

Although not RCT specific, there is also involvement in a Public Health Wales project looking at whether the pandemic impacted more on the housing sector than others. Funding had been secured look at the impacts that poor housing has on health, and how providing more upstream prevention interventions could positively impact housing and health conditions and outcomes; preventing people from having to enter the homelessness system at all.

d) Re new development roles

It is hoped that Project officer roles will remain. Important now to evidence the impact of roles and demonstrate how they contribute to new and innovative ways of working. RCT will be feeding back to HSG how important these roles are, and it would be additionally beneficial if WG were aware of the strategic relevance of these roles and how they have contributed to positive systems change. (Prevention and single persons pathways).

Insights and reflections

Crisis drew on the following data sources to provide insights and learning about the success of the different design opportunities and of the project as a whole:

- Action plans (developed during the discovery phase) that outlined all actions under the design opportunities and contained action-level comments from quarterly update meetings between the Team Lead in the Local Authority and the Senior Best Practice Officer at Crisis
- End-of-quarter staff surveys (n=6, n=2 and n=1 for quarters 1, 2 and 3 respectively)
- Team Lead narrative reports, completed at end of quarters 1, 2, 3 and 4
- End-of-project staff survey (n=4)
- End-of-project Team Lead survey (n=1)

RCT results tracker analysis

The team at RCT Local Authority completed a results tracker of fallout numbers at the end of each quarter during the project and returned them to Crisis for analysis.

Over the four quarters of the project, 2,034 households presented at the Local Authority for homelessness support (varying from 455 to 567 over the quarters). Of this, 310 (15%) of the presenting households were categorised as 'fallen out' of the service. Proportionally, this remained consistent over the four quarters, ranging from 15% to 16%; this suggests that the proportion of cases falling out did not decrease over the course of the project.

Breaking down the fallout rates into fallout from prevention versus fallout from relief revealed some missing data; 30% of the cases that fell out had not been recorded as a prevention or a relief fallout (between 8% of Q1 figures and 43% of Q3 figures).

Prevention cases appeared to be more under-reported; only 9 of the 310 'fallen out' cases were categorised as fallout from prevention duty, compared with 207 from relief duty. With this missing information, it is not possible to glean insights into changes in fallout rates of these different duties over the duration of this project.

To conclude, the results tracker data suggests that fallout rates remained relatively stable during the project, and we cannot ascertain whether fallout from prevention duty or relief duty fluctuated or remained stable.

Eighty-five prison leavers fell out (mainly of relief duty) during the project, representing 27% of the total number of households falling out. However, the raw number dropped steeply over the course of the four quarters, from 38 in Q1 down to 22 in Q2 and then from 19 in Q3 to 6 in Q4. As a proportion of fallout at each quarter, this was a significant reduction from 42% of all fallout cases in Q1 being prison leavers to only 9% by Q4.

This is strong evidence that the actions implemented by the RCT team during this project had a positive impact on reducing fallout for prison leavers. However, given that fallout rates overall did not drop, this suggests that people presenting who were not prison leavers were falling out more over the four quarters.

Table 1: Fallout rates as reported by RCT Local Authority during the project

	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Number of unique households presenting	567		550		462		455		2034	
Number of unique households categorised as 'fall-out'	90	16%	84	15%	69	15%	67	15%	310	15%
Of which prevention	2	2%	7	8%	0	0%	0	0%	9	
Of which relief	72	80%	49	58%	39	57%	47	70%	207	
Unknown	16	18%	28	33%	30	43%	20	30%	94	30%
Number of prison leavers categorised as 'fallen out'	38	42%	22	26%	19	28%	6	9%	85	27%

Statutory data analysis

A total of 216 cases fell out of the system while the project was running in RCT (April 2022 to March 2023). This is comparable to the two years prior to the project starting; 210 in the financial year 2021-2022, and 238 in 2020-2021. An average of 54 cases fell out each quarter, ranging from 39 in Quarter 3 to 74 in Quarter 1, but generally suggested a decline in fallout over the course of the year the actions to prevent fallout were being implemented. Interestingly, this does not appear to be a seasonal pattern, as the two years prior to the project did not show such a large reduction across the quarters (see table below).

Table 2: Fallout count over three years according to statutory records

Financial Year	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	Total
2020-2021	50	65	61	62	238
2021-2022	58	52	47	53	210
2022-2023	74	56	39	47	216

This decrease in fallout over the year was from both Section 66 duty (for the final two quarters of which, no cases fell out) and Section 73 duty (with 72 fallout cases in the first quarter, dropping to 39-49 across the other three quarters, with an average of 45, which is lower than 75% of the fallout from Section 73 in the quarters of the previous two years).

This points to a potential improvement in fallout numbers across the year of the project while fallout actions were being implemented. If the actions are the reason behind this slight decline, then it suggests that actions implemented early on in the project had a marked effect on staff at the LA and passed on to clients.

To explore this further, we used data of fallout rates as a proportion of all cases going into the system. The financial year that coincided with the project saw a slightly lower proportion of cases falling out of the system: 18% of cases, compared to 19% the year before and 22% for the financial year 2020-2021. This was most marked in fallout for those under Section 66 duty, which went from 19% in 2020-2021 and 8% in 2021-2022, to as low as 2% in 2022-2023. However, the proportion had reduced well within the year prior to the project starting, so this reduction is unlikely to be a result of the actions implemented during the project alone. Across all Welsh LAs during 22 / 23 the fall out was 16%, 14% fall out at S66 Prevention and 20% at S73 Relief. Although RCT had a considerably lower percentage of fall out at under Section 66 duties, fall out was higher than the Welsh average under Section 73 duties at 23%.

Staff observations

In the final survey, Crisis' Evaluation team asked for general observations about fallout during the course of the project.

3 respondents (75%) reported that they had noticed a slight decrease in fallout rates since the project started (the other respondent did not know).

There was less agreement on what had brought about this change; while one respondent believed that the actions arising from the project contributed a lot to this decrease, another thought they had contributed a little, and the third did not think the actions had played any part in the reduction in fallout they had observed.

Two respondents (50% believed that the actions had had a moderate positive effect on fallout rates from prevention duty specifically (the other 50% did not believe they had had

an effect). Similarly, two (50%) believed they had had a moderate positive effect on fallout from relief duty, and one respondent (25%) believed it had had a moderate negative effect.

One expanded on their response commenting that:

'I feel all actions have played a role in the fall out which range from working with clients at an early stage to help them better understand TA arrangements. More focus on providing the right information at the right time has also been helpful.'

Staff were asked to describe the changes over the course of the project that they believed made the most significant difference to reducing fallout. For fallout from prevention duty, respondents gave the following answers:

'Increased engagement with support workers'

'Re-focusing on Prevention Work... the prevention manual will be key for officers to assist them in prevention of homelessness... More positive work with private landlords to keep applicants in their current tenancies by offering incentives as well as the promise of a support package for the client as an additional tool to re-assure private landlords.'

'Clearer communication through the development of information leaflets. Better understanding of why people may fall out of the system. Revised operational practice.'

'A help sheet has been created to give [landlords] more information on how things need to be done legally. A new support team is in the process of being created to help the case officers focus more on prevention, and the new support team will focus more on the TA case load. The new health team are now giving specialist support to people with mental health and/or substance misuse issues.'

Regarding the most significant changes for reducing fallout from relief duty, the following answers were given:

'Increased involvement with support workers'

'The regular presence of support at our support team at the TA provision has helped with reducing fallout as in some of the provision, this contact can be daily if required (such as Housing First) The Outreach Team have been beneficial in addressing and assisting health requirements of applicants placed in TA, which has resulted in multi-agency working to identify the best and most suitable options for a client. This has included Adult Social Care provision in some cases. Staff will be encouraged to continue to refer to Outreach Health Team to ensure health needs of clients are met when in TA.'

'Clearer information and managing client expectation; The development of clear guidance working with other providers who have had their roles and responsibilities aligned to our area of work.'

'We have started enforcing the rules in place more so that any issues are dealt with via a warning system, if people do breach the rules they will meet with support or myself to see if there is anything that can be put in place to support them to maintain their placement. I think that when placements see others consistently breach the rules with no action others start to feel they can behave the same and others living in the environment may leave as they don't like living with chaotic behaviour. Now we are taking action I feel people feel safer at their placements they know that people will face consequences if they consistently breach the rules.'

We were supplied with details of two cases where the actions implemented in the project resulted in someone not falling out of the system who otherwise might have:

'Applicant was a revolving door applicant who could not manage TA on his previous releases from prison. POP (Short Term Prison Offender Project) have been supporting and the support has been daily, and this relationship between applicant and support worker was established in custody which has been beneficial in terms of having trust, and a point of contact when in the community. This has enabled the client to manage his TA placement with support and has moved on positively into a supported housing placement whereby he still receives support from POP in addition to support from the support provider in the project.'

'We have a placement in TA who has had a very chaotic life pretty much since the day he was born and has experienced significant trauma such as sexual assault, parents being heavy substance misusers and subsequently he has living in squalid conditions with no childhood affects such as toys. We have worked with this individual over a number of years but now we have ensured that there is a lot more services involved such as the specialist health team, staff at The Hotel ensuring that his room is kept to a good standard (previously he would hoard items he had collected from skips etc) and daily support from his designated support worker. I feel it would have been very easy to end this person's placement but that wouldn't really be beneficial as he would have either been street homeless or be putting himself in very risky situations. Slowly but surely his lifestyle is becoming less chaotic, his behaviour towards other people such as staff has improved and gradually he is getting closer to being able to have his own property.'

However, staff also referred to factors beyond the project that they believed were affecting fallout rates in their area:

'Given the massive rent increases in the private rental and the impact of the rent in homes Wales act on private landlords selling their properties I'd imagine that prevention has got increasingly difficult. Since I started in my current position there is a lot more support available now as we have the specialist health team who visit the TA's and help people with their substance misuse and mental health which is a major contributory factor in a large portion of the people we provide a service for.'

One member of staff also referred to the Renting Homes Act 2016 and felt that it had an unrelated negative effect on fallout rates, as has Cost of Living Crisis and PRS increases.

Feedback on the project

Staff were asked to reflect on their experience of being involved in this project.

The majority reported that their experience was positive (two specified 'very positive' and one specified 'positive'), while one (25%) responded that it was neither a positive nor negative experience.

Three survey respondents (75%) did not feel being in the project had affected their own workload; one (25%) reported a moderate positive effect.

For 50% of respondents, being part of this project had had a moderate positive effect on their team's processes and ways of working regarding both homeless presentation and other areas of work. The other 50% felt there had been no effect.

'Some of the tasks identified as part of the Crisis work have been on our do list for some time. Being involved in the Crisis work has helped us to focus as a team and get the job done with good early outcomes.'

The two respondents who had been involved in the discovery and solution planning phase reflected on how that phase had affected their capacity:

'Gave me awareness of the gaps in the case work process which required improvements'

'It was time out of what was a huge workload.'

They reported that the workshopping activities had been a beneficial process:

'It was positive to be part of the development sessions and to have some input into proposed improvements.'

'A challenge but like everything you have to see the benefits and keep the end product in sight.'

Neither thought that the workshopping activities would be better replaced by a different activity.

All four respondents were asked about how the implementation phase had affected their capacity and workload. Responses suggested the added pressure did not outweigh the benefits:

'Given the pressures in the service, this was an additional process which did increase capacity issues, but I have seen this as a positive as ultimately the changes

that are being made on the back of this work will make the case work process and outcomes far more positive for staff and clients.'

'None, we have not received the manuals stated. We have not been giving clear guidance on the new single person pathway, and posts are yet to be advertised, so I would imagine the single person pathway is a long way from being up and running'.

As before high workload did add to the pressures of meeting and implementing new process across the Team. But the work was important and sometimes time it is good to reflect and take time out.

'Due to the all-in policy implemented by government my job has always been at capacity and my workload high, it's not a complaint it is what it is but as a service we are working at capacity. '

All four respondents (100%) felt the reflection surveys sent to staff on a quarterly basis were an effective way to gather feedback. One respondent suggested that face-to-face meetings rather than surveys may have been less time consuming.

For a final comment, one staff member suggested that a review of distance travelled every 12 months over a three-year period might be helpful.

The team lead responded that being involved in the project was a positive experience for them and for their team; the external support from Crisis was helpful; and the frameworks, templates, tools and practices would be helpful for other current and future projects.

'It was a really good experience and helped us as a local authority do some of things we have needed to put in place for a while...'

'The input from Crisis was essential in a busy Housing Solutions Service. It would have been really easy to lose focus and not complete the required areas of work...'

'I personally found reflection and meeting with Marcia and others really beneficial. It is good to talk and share experience with other professionals.'

When asked about what did not work so well, they responded with:

'It was difficult service area to keep everyone focused and it is important to reiterate to staff the purpose of the project.'

The learning they would take away from the project was:

'Being focused and understanding the purpose and what you want from the project at the start.'

Concluding remarks

The project was commissioned pre Covid-19, and the 'fall out' considered spanned pre and post pandemic years, which were both very different landscapes and each Welsh LA faced unprecedented pressures and demands on services.

RCT took this as an opportunity to undertake a full-service provision review and were innovative in their use of Welsh Government (WG) pandemic support grants; employing two new Project Officers to review current service provision and data, map out existing housing options, and link this into RCT's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. Their aim was to scope out and develop a set of new service specifications to meet the challenges of increased presentations, complex needs customers, and to reduce the numbers of people falling out of the system because of unmet needs.

RCT viewed this project as an opportunity to expand on this further and gain additional insights into different areas of services provision which may also have been contributing to people falling out of the statutory homelessness system.

During the discovery phase the project team gained a wide range of insights which enabled a tailored action plan to be developed, alongside the development of additional resources which could support the planning and implementation of actions that could be trialed and tested to see if they helped reduce fall out levels in RCT.

Many of the actions agreed on with RCT were completed and good progress was made against the majority that were outstanding. These ran alongside all the broader internal work that was taking place at the same time.

Although the internal developments did not necessarily stem from this project's work, many of the actions developed could be considered as linked in some way. For example, improving means of sharing information and communicating with customers could mean that they were more likely to engage with and sustain the added support now being offered in TA or supported accommodation.

RCT developed a range of new pathways, all aimed at ensuring that customers accessed the support they needed at the time that was right for them, and by adding additional layers of support in Housing Options services, TA, and supported accommodation it was hoped that it would help reduce the numbers of people falling out of the system.

There is no doubt that supply and access to affordable accommodation was a significant barrier to enabling people to move on from TA, but there were some notable successes during this project. A highlight was RCT's approach to data collection. By amalgamating and improving data collection across a range of data sources RCT were able to track people's movements within the homelessness system, identify repeat homelessness, and track what stages people were falling out of the system. This led to more targeted resources and redesigned pathways to reduce the risk of people falling out of the system. RCT plans to continue improving data collection and analysis for ongoing service improvements.

Partnerships were crucial for the project, and there was acknowledgment of the long-term benefits of enhancing and strengthening them. All partnership meetings were either reviewed and revitalised as part of developing new pathways and revised service specifications, or by reinforcing connections with statutory and non-statutory partners through workshops and meetings.

During the project RCT developed targeted partnerships to improve outcomes for prison leavers. This was achieved by improving relationships between housing and Probation, the co-location of staff, and by the Housing Support team providing a dedicated point of contact for prison leavers and Probation. A new prisoner pathway was developed alongside a Short-Term Prison Offender Project, which supports prison leavers on release and through their journey to secure accommodation. Additionally, data collection on housing application and support needs for Probation clients and prison leavers was enhanced. By the end of the project RCT were seeing a decrease in fallout among prison leavers.

During the 12 months that the fallout-reducing actions were being implemented, the statutory data showed that although the numbers of people falling out of the system whilst the project was running is comparable to the prior two years, it also suggested a decline in fallout over the course of the year that the project took place, specifically relating to prevention activities during the last two quarters of the project.

Although the LA were under considerable pressures at the time, in general, staff felt that it was a positive experience taking part in the project and that it helped to consolidate a number of actions that had been on their 'to do' list for a while, and the project helped the team to collectively focus. Overall, the Team Lead also felt that being involved in the project was a positive experience, that the external support from Crisis was helpful, and that the frameworks, templates, tools, and practices would be beneficial for other current and future projects.

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for people facing homelessness across Wales, Scotland and England. We know that homelessness is not inevitable, and we know that together, we can end it.

We provide services directly to people experiencing homelessness, carry out research into the causes and consequences of homelessness, and campaign for the changes needed to end it.

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