Evaluating the Contribution the Supporting People Programme makes to Preventing and Tackling Homelessness in Wales – Feasibility Study

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Summary

- The Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW) was asked by the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty to provide advice on how the contribution of the Supporting People Programme to tackling and preventing homelessness might be evaluated.

- A review of relevant research and policy documents was undertaken along with semi-structured discussions with a number of key informants.

- The contribution of the Supporting People programme to tackling and preventing homelessness has a number of dimensions:
    - tackling homelessness in an immediate sense for those who have no home;
    - preventing homelessness in the statutory sense, i.e. those threatened with homelessness within 56 days;
    - broader prevention for those who may be at risk of losing their home if support were not provided;
    - support which builds protective factors to reduce the risk of homelessness.

- The implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 is expected to prompt a shift to more shorter support interventions.

- Previous evaluations from Wales, across the UK and beyond, provide some useful learning, but none provides a model or approach which can be adopted wholesale for the purpose examined by this piece of work.

- A range of relevant data, both quantitative and qualitative, is available or collection is being planned.

- Possible alternative approaches to evaluation go beyond existing data, e.g. financial assessment and a completely service-user focused approach.

- The evidence from previous evaluations informs a direction of travel for how the evaluation of the contribution of the Supporting People programme to tackling and preventing homelessness could be evaluated.

- This report sets out a suggested approach which includes:
    - both quantitative and qualitative data drawn from organisational and service user perspectives;
    - a set of principles;
    - definitions of preventing and tackling homelessness;
    - making the most of existing data sources and processes;
    - embedding an agreed quantitative dataset into the new Supporting People outcomes framework due to be in place for April 2016.

Introduction

The Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW) was asked by the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty to provide expert advice on how the contribution the Supporting People Programme makes to preventing and tackling homelessness could be evaluated. The specific questions to be addressed were:

- The Theory of Change
    - In what ways might the Supporting People programme be expected to help prevent and tackle homelessness?
    - Is its role in relation to homelessness likely to change in light of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 and if so how?
- Previous Evaluation Research
    - Have there been any other evaluations of the contribution that Supporting People programmes make to preventing and tackling homelessness? If yes, what methods were used and what can we learn from them?
    - Has previous research on the Supporting People programme highlighted any issues that are relevant to the feasibility study?
    - How have similar programmes been evaluated and what can we learn from them?
- Data and Methods
    - What sorts of data are currently available to inform an evaluation of the impact which the Supporting People programme has on homelessness?
    - Are the existing available data sufficient?
    - If not, what other evidence would be required and how could this be collected?
    - Is there any scope for an experimental approach to evaluating the impact of the Supporting People programme on homelessness, and if so, how might this be done?
    - What other methods might be used alongside or instead of an experimental approach?
- Timescale and resources
    - What sort of timescale and resources might be needed for an evaluation of the impact of the Supporting People programme on homelessness?

This report draws on a review of relevant research and policy documents and on semi-structured discussions with a number of key informants (see Appendix 1 for a list).

The Role of the Supporting People Programme in Preventing and Tackling Homelessness

Context

The Supporting People programme provides housing-related support to enable people to live independently in their own homes across Wales. In 2015/16, the Welsh Government is investing around £124.5 million in the Supporting People programme through which over 50,000 individuals will be supported, a significant proportion of whom are older people[1]. The contribution of Supporting People to preventing and tackling homelessness needs to be considered in the context of the wide variety of services funded by the Supporting People programme.

Services can be roughly divided into floating support and accommodation based services. Floating support services are targeted at those who may be at risk of losing their home, or at those who need support to move into a new home. Such services are likely to reduce factors associated with a higher risk of homelessness such as debt, substance misuse, poor mental or physical health and lack of a social support network (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000). In accommodation-based services such as hostels and supported accommodation specifically for certain groups of homeless people (the Llamau safe model being an example for 16 and 17 year olds[2]), it is evident that Supporting People funded services are both tackling homelessness and contributing to its prevention. Accommodation is being provided where none was previously available to the individual and support is provided to address at least some of the issues that contributed to the individual becoming homeless and therefore to reduce future risk of homelessness. Accommodation-based services can be divided into direct access, temporary supported housing and permanent supported housing.

Supporting People services are also provided to a wide range of client groups, with some in receipt of services on an ongoing basis, while others are in receipt of time-limited services.

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[1] http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/services-and-support/supporting-people/?lang=en and http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/publications/141202-meg-en.pdf
[2] http://www.llamau.org.uk/supported-housing/

The Aylward Review and the role of the Supporting People programme in preventing and tackling homelessness

Analysis of the outcomes of the Supporting People programme in England prior to the removal of the ring-fence provided some evidence that the programme reduced homelessness (Pleace et al, 2015).

The Aylward review of the Supporting People Programme in Wales, published in 2010, also found evidence from the United States and United Kingdom *'suggesting that providing vulnerable people and families with housing-related support can lead to significant reductions in homelessness.'* (Aylward et al, 2010, p.34)

The review also noted:

> *'The programme also helps families who are homeless, Those that may previously have been put up in bedsits are now housed in secure accommodation and provided with training and skills opportunities. The clients are provided support in developing financial, parenting and IT [skills] which can prevent homelessness from becoming a problem'.*
>
> (Op cit: 14)

Development of Welsh Government thinking

Since the publication of the Aylward review, Welsh Government thinking about the role of the Supporting People programme in relation to tackling and preventing homelessness has developed. Letters issued to Supporting People leads within local authorities by former and current Welsh Government Ministers with responsibility for housing in October 2013 and November 2014, emphasised the need for a greater emphasis on preventing homelessness and closer links between homelessness services and the Supporting People programme, in terms of both strategic planning and delivery of services. An oral statement by the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty in May 2015 emphasised the need for local authorities and service providers to work together to ensure Supporting People services complement other homelessness services[3].

Officials are currently reviewing local authority commissioning of Supporting People services and how the funding is spent, are promoting links between Supporting People and

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[3] http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/pages/rop.aspx?meetingid=3165&language=en&c=Record%20of%20Proceedings#218396 – statement on homelessness legislation

homelessness and looking at evidence of links in respect of the planning of services and availability of 'preventative' services. Guidance on Supporting People is being redrafted to reflect the current context and will be available in draft by the end of 2015.

The most recent letter from Welsh Government to local authorities in respect of Supporting People funding issued in May 2015 noted that the purpose of funding is to enable them to support vulnerable people and those at risk of homelessness to live as independently as possible through the provision of housing-related support services. In addition, the Welsh Government has emphasised in grant award letters the importance of linking Supporting People services to wider tackling poverty objectives.

Evaluating the contribution of the Supporting People programme to homelessness: factors to consider

There are a number of impediments to identifying a direct causal link from the provision of a Supporting People service to the prevention of homelessness. As noted in a previous PPIW report reviewing the evidence on tackling homelessness (Carter, 2015), homelessness can be caused by a multitude of social, individual and economic factors (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000). Quilgars (2013) found in relation to young people, that there is never a single cause of homelessness, rather a combination of the needs of the young person, poor family and peer support and economic marginalisation, all in the context of structural barriers to housing, work and welfare systems. In addition, homeless households or individuals may well access a number of services at the same time. Added to this are the ethical dilemmas of using control groups as a means of identifying cause and effect related to a Supporting People intervention. However, while proving direct cause and effect is very difficult, if not impossible, (other than in the case of provision of supported housing to someone who is actually homeless), it should be possible to identify at least some of the contribution that the Supporting People programme makes to preventing and tackling homelessness.

The extent to which the Supporting People programme might be considered to contribute to preventing and tackling homelessness will depend on how homelessness is defined. A fairly narrow statutory definition could be adopted, or a broad definition which includes, not only immediate prevention, but prevention of homelessness recurring and/or wider prevention which builds resilience or reduces the factors known to be associated with homelessness.

It may be helpful to think of the contribution of the Supporting People programme to preventing and tackling homelessness as having four (not wholly mutually exclusive) elements:

1. Tackling homelessness where people are actually homeless at the point of accessing a service through the provision of support which is provided alongside accommodation. This element will also include support for a transition to (more) independent living;
2. Preventing homelessness in the terms of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, i.e. people who are threatened with homeless within 56 days;
3. Prevention beyond this statutory definition through the provision of support to people in accommodation who would be at risk of homelessness if the support were not being provided;
4. Broader prevention through the provision of support which builds protective factors and resilience to reduce the risk of homelessness occurring at any time in the future, e.g. employability, self-confidence, positive attitudes, access to strong social and community networks etc.

Is the role of the Supporting People programme in preventing and tackling homelessness changed by the new homelessness legislation?

What difference might the implementation of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 make? Part 2 sets out duties on local authorities to assess needs and take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness; specifically two duties in relation to preventing and tackling homelessness:

'Duty to help to secure accommodation for homeless applicants

A local housing authority must help to secure that suitable accommodation is available for occupation by an applicant, if the authority is satisfied that the applicant is—

(a) homeless, and

(b) eligible for help.

But the duty does not apply if the authority refers the application to another local housing authority.

Duty to help to prevent an applicant from becoming homeless

A local housing authority must help to secure that suitable accommodation does not cease to be available for occupation by an applicant if the authority is satisfied that the applicant is—

(a) threatened with homelessness, and

(b) eligible for help.

The above subsection does not affect any right of the authority, whether by virtue of a contract, enactment or rule of law, to secure vacant possession of any accommodation.'

The new version of the Welsh Government Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness issued to support Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 which came into force in April 2015, is clear that local authorities are expected to focus Supporting People services on the objective of preventing homelessness and refers to enabling people to 'establish a settled lifestyle and sustain their homes' (Welsh Government, April 2015). The Code identifies the provision of housing/tenancy support, access to supported housing and options for the accommodation of vulnerable people, including that funded by Supporting People, as three of the range of preventative interventions that local authorities should have in place as a minimum in order to be able to take 'reasonable steps' in relation to any individual.

Discussions with key informants indicated that there is an expectation of a shift to a greater proportion of shorter Supporting People funded interventions as a result of the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This would suggest more services that are focused on the first two elements of tackling and preventing homelessness outlined above, as opposed to those that accord with broader definitions of homelessness. One of the recommendations from a survey undertaken by Cymorth Cymru/WLGA/SPIN last year was to consider whether different approaches need to be devised to assess outcomes of short-term and long-term Supporting People services (Cymorth Cymru/WLGA/SPIN, 2014).

What Do Previous Evaluations Tell Us?

DeCandia (2012) explains that it is important to evaluate services providing help to those at risk of/ experiencing homelessness for three reasons. According to DeCandia evaluations:

- provide data to help providers better understand and improve programme processes and outcomes (Metz, 2007, cited in DeCandia, 2012);
- can be the basis for communicating a programme's effectiveness to others;
- can be used to guide decisions on whether or not to continue with the same programme approach or to change approach.

This section of the report explains previous evaluations of the Supporting People programme and other similar initiatives from Wales, the rest of the UK and beyond and the lessons that can be learnt.

Previous evaluations in Wales

In 2006, Welsh Government-commissioned research on the costs and benefits of the Supporting People programme was published (Welsh Government, 2006). The study took a modelling approach of costs and benefits over a single year, informed by a literature review and stakeholder input. The consultants who undertook the study acknowledged that, in the face of significant gaps in evidence, they made a number of assumptions in their modelling. The most significant of these were the assumption that the service(s) being funded by Supporting People would not be provided from any other source of funding were Supporting People funding not available[4] and not taking account of variations in the intensity and type of support offered.

The study identified, and costed, a number of impacts of the Supporting People programme in relation to homeless households:
- reduction in tenancy failures from settled accommodation;
- percentage of people/families helped to move into permanent accommodation by the support provided by Supporting People;
- percentage of people who are in temporary housing who would otherwise be sleeping rough.

And in relation to households with lead needs other than homelessness where there was an impact on homelessness:
- reducing likelihood of tenancy failure;
- people prevented from becoming homeless;
- reduction in total (i.e. not just older people) homelessness due to older people population receiving Supporting People.

The modelling identified substantial cost savings associated with Supporting People services for single homeless people. Lack of disaggregated data meant that it was not possible to do

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[4] In relation to this assumption, my personal view is that some individuals/households would receive services similar to those funded by Supporting People from other sources of funding, e.g. from social landlords' own funding, social care budgets, etc., but this is not based on any evidence and it would be very difficult to prove or disprove.

the modelling for homeless families. The modelling also led to the overall conclusion that £1.68 is saved for every £1 invested in Supporting People services.

The Welsh Government commissioned a scoping review on measuring the impact of Supporting People which was published in 2013 (Pleace, 2013). The review looked at existing data and studies of Supporting People projects, consulted with service providers, identified methodological issues and provided options for the procurement of an evaluation study. The requirements set for the Welsh Government for assessing the impact of Supporting People were extensive and included gaining an accurate picture of recipients of Supporting People services and the services they receive, understanding expenditure, effectiveness, benefits and impacts.

The review identified four types of evaluation of the impact of Supporting People, each of which has challenges regarding implementation and limitations:

- the development of outcome monitoring systems both for Supporting People as a whole and for particular types of housing support services – service goals must be explicit and clear and it is difficult to put in place an outcomes monitoring system that works equally well for all Supporting People funded services;
- attempts to explore the costs and benefits of the Supporting People programme – modelling is not the same as identifying precise costs and benefits and there are service overlap issues;
- attempts to understand the outcomes of Supporting People projects from the perspective of service users, including surveys of service users - representative samples are difficult to achieve;
- detailed evaluations of housing support services – robust evaluations which include a longitudinal element are expensive.

The review concluded that *'there is no one method or approach that can be used to fully understand Supporting People project outcomes and impacts'* and *'broadly speaking the most expensive methods will yield the best results'.* It made a number of recommendations as to how evaluation could be undertaken, including a cohort longitudinal study which is the approach being considered for a proposed piece of qualitative research on Supporting People.

An independent review of the Supporting People transition year, following the move to new structures in 2012, involved a desk-top review of documentation, semi-structured interviews

and a series of group interviews/workshops. The review concluded '*Given the likelihood of further financial cuts, there is an increasing need for the Programme to evidence its impacts and outcomes*' (Miller Research, 2014). The review made two recommendations in relation to impacts and outcomes:

- ensuring common understanding that a robust evidence base, informed by the Outcomes Framework, for the impacts and outcomes of Supporting People funding is required to secure future funding for the Programme;

- gaining engagement in the outcomes framework by embedding it in practice to support continued service improvement.

Evaluation of homelessness prevention work has also been commissioned by the Welsh Government in the past (e.g. Housing+Cymru, 2011). However, such research has not examined the role of Supporting People funded services in the prevention of homelessness.

Previous evaluations from the rest of the UK

Evaluation of homelessness prevention in England (Pawson et al, 2007a) and Scotland (Pawson et al, 2007b) both looked at the role of tenancy sustainment.

The English research involved an analysis of monitoring returns from local authorities for projects in receipt of grants in excess of £100,000 in 2003-4, a review of existing research on homelessness prevention, detailed case study work, including cost effectiveness analysis and two case studies focusing on prison service initiatives to prevent homelessness. The research found that the provision of support for newly rehoused, formerly homeless households to help them retain their tenancies funded by Supporting People was common place, but that services were very diverse in character. The research also found that, due to inadequate monitoring, there was relatively little hard evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of these services in preventing homelessness. In addition, it noted that assessing the cost effectiveness of tenancy sustainment is difficult, mainly because it is not easy to identify what would have happened if the support was not in place. However, the researchers undertook a financial assessment of a single tenancy sustainment scheme and found it to be highly cost-effective in relation to its assumed role in helping to reduce council evictions. The study used individual cases to identify the average cost of an eviction from social housing as £4,000.

The Scottish research involved a telephone survey of all Scottish local authorities, detailed case study work in five local authorities and interviews with homelessness prevention service users. The research looked at tenancy sustainment schemes and the role of transitional supported housing in preventing homelessness for young people. In relation to transitional supported housing, which aimed to support the transition of young people into permanent tenancies, the case study element of the research found that only around half of the young people moving on from the projects moved into mainstream social housing tenancies, some returned to the parental home and a proportion were evicted for anti-social behaviour. On tenancy sustainment, the research noted that these schemes play an important role in reducing repeat homelessness. It found that local authorities tended to rate tenancy sustainment schemes as the most effective form of prevention, but that this was infrequently backed up by hard evidence. A first step in improving the evidence on the effectiveness of these schemes was felt to be monitoring the proportion of tenancies sustained in the period following engagement with these services. The need to track individuals subsequent to a homelessness prevention intervention was one of the overall conclusions of this research. The need to track individuals was also raised by research on floating support in Northern Ireland (RSM McClure Watters, 2012)

Evaluation of a programme of homelessness prevention innovation fund projects in Scotland did not examine projects which involved Supporting People services, but did draw useful conclusions on methodologies used to evaluate homelessness prevention (Sharp and Robertson, 2008). In summary, these were the need to:

- agree what success would look like amongst relevant agencies – recognising that many homelessness prevention projects are based on multi-agency working;
- measure and map outcomes;
- balance planning evaluation in advance with the need to be flexible in the face of the unexpected;
- review administrative recording systems to enable efficient capture of information;
- consider the practicalities of information collection in relation to the service users with which the project is working e.g. expecting the completion of lengthy forms with service users may be highly inappropriate;
- involve service users in a real way; peer-led evaluation is worthy of consideration.

An evaluation of a series of Supporting People Health Pilots, which looked at the contribution of Supporting People services to improved health, used three sources of information – semi-structured interviews with service users and professionals, completed project evaluation reports highlighting progress in relation to identified outcomes and reflexive diaries (DCLG,

2006). The study highlighted the importance of establishing outcomes as a means to demonstrate the impact of joint working and recommended a blended approach to evaluation using evidence from service users and professionals, alongside monitoring against outcomes or proxy outcomes.

A small number of Supporting People Payment by Results Pilots have been evaluated (DCLG, 2014). In Salford, the approach was used to incentivise homelessness prevention for young people, with a target for the proportion of young people returning to the family home following mediation. As the evaluation points out, there is a potential danger with this approach in that some young people may be inappropriately returned home in order for the target to be met and the additional funds released. Trafford used the approach to encourage planned and sustainable move-on for single homeless men and women, measured by whether the service user re-presents to housing advice/homelessness services within 12 months. In both cases, 10% of the contract value was linked to achievement of targets.

Previous evaluations from outside the UK

A consistent theme in all the UK evaluations reviewed is gaps in the evidence base. An example of the most methodologically robust evaluations comes from the United States in relation to homeless people with severe mental illness (Pleace with Wallace, 2011). Many such evaluations use standardised and validated outcome measures. Standardised in the sense that they use outcome measures that clinicians and health service commissioners recognise from mental health service evaluations. Validated in the sense that they have been used in multiple studies under different circumstances and have been found to produce consistent results. A randomised control trial approach is commonly used, but quasi-experimental approaches are also used which employ comparison groups that are broad, rather than precise, matches. There is a general expectation that these studies will be longitudinal, with tracking continuing after contact with the housing support service has stopped. These approaches are not without criticism e.g. a high attrition rate may occur, there is an absence of service user input and some studies make little allowance for context.

An evaluation of an Australian family homelessness prevention pilot, which focused on early intervention, looked at outcome measures at the start of support and on its completion, with measures collected in a database for 459 families (RPR Consulting, 2005). The pilot achieved a reduction in the proportion of families spending more than 30% of their income on housing and an increase in the expectation of future stable housing, both being associated with a reduction in the risk of homelessness. The data on these families was

compared to other homeless families who had not accessed the support provided through the pilot using census data (which proved difficult) and longitudinal data on a specific cohort of homeless families from the state of Victoria, to identify whether the families assisted through the pilot had similar characteristics to families who had actually become homeless; the populations were found to have very similar characteristics.

While previous evaluations from Wales, across the UK and beyond, provide some useful learning, none provides a model or approach which can be adopted wholesale in order to evaluate the contribution of the Supporting People programme to tackling and preventing homelessness. However, the evidence from previous evaluations does inform a direction of travel for how such evaluation might be carried out.

Data and Methods

Existing data and developments

A range of relevant data, both quantitative and qualitative, on the Supporting People programme in Wales is available or collection is being planned.   .

Individual level data is collected and reported for both Supporting People and homelessness.

The current outcomes data recorded and reported for each individual in receipt of Supporting People funded services focuses on the achievement of goals in relation to four elements[5]. While managing accommodation is considered as one aspect of 'promoting independence and control', the current format of the data does not include specific reference to homelessness. This financial year, nine local authorities are piloting the addition of a question which asks about homelessness status of an individual when they enter and leave a Supporting People funded service. Data will be available in October which will enable an initial assessment of how successful this approach is.

There is a commitment for a new outcomes framework to be in place from April 2016. A survey of Cymorth Cymru and Supporting People Information Network members found that the current framework does not provide the information that is required at a national level, indeed there is a lack of clarity about what the purpose of outcomes data is, and that significant change is needed (Cymorth Cymru/WLGA/SPIN, 2014). The development of a

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[5] The four elements are: promoting personal and community safety; promoting independence and control; promoting economic progress and financial control; and promoting health and well-being.

new framework provides an opportunity for tackling and preventing homelessness to be embedded within the outcomes framework alongside maintaining independence.

Work is also underway to consider how the Supporting People outcomes framework fits in with the common outcomes framework developed for Communities First, Families First and Flying Start (although there are no accommodation related indicators within this). The changing context for outcomes measurement also includes outcomes being collected in relation to the new Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014[6] which include 'I have suitable living accommodation that meets my needs'.

Turning to wider homelessness data, the WHO12 form which local authorities complete in relation to homelessness has been substantially amended to take account of the new legislation. The inclusion of questions which aim to identify the proportion of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness who have received a Supporting People intervention has been suggested by Welsh Government. Based on the experience of prevention data collected from local authorities last financial year, there is a risk that the data in relation to these questions will not be of publishable quality this financial year and as a consequence a piloting approach has been adopted.

The datasets generated by the Supporting People outcomes and WHO12 returns will differ. The Supporting People outcomes dataset has the potential to provide information on risk of homelessness for all those in receipt of Supporting People services, while the WHO12 dataset will only include those who have gone to a local authority to get help with a housing issue and to whom the local authority has a duty to assist under the new legislation. The WHO12 data is therefore measuring the interface between homelessness and Supporting People and not the totality of the contribution of Supporting People to tackling and preventing homelessness.

There are no national strategic indicators for either Supporting People or homelessness. The previous national strategic indicator on the prevention of homelessness (the percentage of all potentially homeless households for whom homelessness was prevented for at least 6 months) was discontinued for 2014/15 following significant concerns about consistency of reporting by local authorities and substantive amendments to the WHO12 form.

Two substantive pieces of qualitative research are anticipated, with one at the point of being commissioned while for the other, proposals are being developed. An evaluation of the homelessness legislation will track people through a service and follow them up at a number

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[6] http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/140814nofen.pdf

of stages after this. In addition, it is proposed that a qualitative study of Supporting People would follow a cohort of service users over time and focus on their experiences. Both of these pieces of research provide an opportunity to assess the impact of interventions on the risk of homelessness, (as well as a range of other factors), for a small sample of service users.

Case studies have been used over the years by service providers to demonstrate the impact of Supporting People funded services on the lives of service users. It would be useful for case studies to include in a consistent way whether homelessness or risk of homelessness is an issue for the individual, how the Supporting People funded service has sought to address this and whether the service user considers that their risk of homelessness is lower as a result. Importantly, the proposed qualitative research would focus strongly on the service user perspective, while case studies have the potential to do so. Gwent RCC have developed a template for case studies which includes a cost benefit analysis using agreed figures from England.

Looking to the potential for data matching, exploration is underway as to whether there is potential to link Supporting People data with other data sets such as health, education and, in future, social care, contained in the SAIL databank[7]. This process has significant potential to identify the use by those receiving Supporting People services of other services such as GPs, hospitals, unscheduled care etc., and would provide comparison with a synthetic control group, i.e. those not in receipt of Supporting People services. Issues such as the unique identifier used to enable matching of different datasets relating are being considered, with a report due in October 2015. As well as the logistics of data matching, the issue of the short term nature of some Supporting People services and the frequency with which some service users move are challenges to effective data matching being undertaken.

Beyond existing data

Key informants noted that Supporting People is based on the principle of empowering individuals; taking a strengths-based approach[8] would mean that outcomes are accredited to service users, not to organisations. It might be possible to take a service user perspective which considers that building people's ability to address shocks, stresses and uncertainties will reduce the risk of homelessness occurring or being repeated. In order to do this, individuals in receipt of support would need to be supported to identify the particular issues they face and be asked whether the support provided has put them in a position to better be

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[7] http://www.saildatabank.com
[8] For example http://www.livesthroughfriends.org/index.php

able to address them. This approach would provide rich service-user focused data, but the very nature of the data means that it would be fairly meaningless to try and aggregate it to a national level. It would be appropriate to integrate this approach into case studies.

Overall costs and benefits were identified for the Supporting People programme in Wales in 2006 (Welsh Government, 2006). Guidance on using financial savings analysis for homelessness services identifies three models – unit costs, costed case studies and total programme costs (Homeless Link, undated). It also identifies a range of challenges with the financial savings approach. Financial measures are limited to results that can be seen quickly. Identifying financial savings is useful but can be reductionist and using savings to assess the value of services may lead to unfair comparisons between services. Any cost benefit figure is only an estimate. In addition, constructing counterfactuals (what would have happened in the absence of a service being provided) also involves making significant assumptions in the absence of a control group. Verified figures are available for some costs in England; the Homeless Link publication has an appendix which lists English unit cost data for range of factors relating to health, social care and crime and anti-social behaviour services. The cost benefit study of the overall Supporting People programme in Wales used English figures on which Welsh service commissioners and providers were provided an opportunity to comment (Welsh Government, 2006). The lack of agreed figures specific to Wales is a significant impediment to undertaking financial savings analysis for Supporting People as it relates to tackling and preventing homelessness.

Challenges and Issues

Discussions with key informants identified a range of challenges in evaluating the contribution of the Supporting People programme to tackling and preventing homelessness.

- Supporting People services are very varied, from the provision of long-term services to very short interventions and services addressing a variety of issues and needs. This means that any modelling inevitably has to make significant assumptions and that any evaluation framework put in place may seem less relevant to some Supporting People funded services/projects than others;
- Supporting People is increasingly being seen as the answer to a number of issues, e.g. prevention of homelessness, tackling poverty, welfare reform. There is a question as to what priority the prevention of homelessness is as compared to other issues, although the commencement of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 helps to clarify this;
- how do you measure early intervention and prevention by Supporting People services when some individuals will not go anywhere near statutory services?;

- need to ensure Supporting People's contribution to both tackling and preventing homelessness are assessed; all homelessness cannot be prevented and hostels and other specialist supported accommodation play an important role in tackling homelessness where it has already occurred;

- Supporting People does not operate in a vacuum; other policies can have a negative impact on the ability to prevent homelessness, e.g. welfare reform;

- whether different approaches should be adopted for short and long-term Supporting People services (the Supporting People Revenue Grant/Supporting People Grant split which used to be in place) in relation to assessing their contribution to tackling and preventing homelessness. Long-term services are much less likely to be tackling and preventing homelessness in the immediate sense than short-term services, but are likely to be preventing homelessness in a broader sense[9].

A range of relevant data on the Supporting People programme in Wales is available or collection is being planned. Possible alternative approaches to evaluation include financial assessment of the costs and benefits of the Supporting People programme in relation to homelessness and a completely service-user focused approach to gathering data. There are challenges in identifying an appropriate data set; a combination of quantitative and qualitative data is likely to be needed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Preventing and tackling homelessness

The evidence from previous evaluations informs a direction of travel for how the contribution of the Supporting People programme to tackling and preventing homelessness could be evaluated. It is possible to distil from the previous evaluations and the views of key informants, a series of principles:

- that tackling and preventing homelessness are considered as outcomes from Supporting People in their own right; this requires clarity of definitions in relation to tackling and preventing homelessness;

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[9] 'Broader sense' equating to elements 3 and 4 of the suggested typology of how Supporting People contributes to tackling and preventing homelessness set out on page 7.

- acknowledgement of the diversity of Supporting People services and of the detail of commissioning and service delivery; it is not just immediate short-term actions that prevent or tackle homelessness;
- that there is benefit in involving different perspectives in evaluation, e.g. both quantitative and qualitative, service user and professional perspectives;
- the need to avoid 'over-claiming' the role of Supporting People services, given that people may be in receipt of other services and the difficulty of identifying counterfactuals;
- not trying to use a dataset to tell a story that it can't; using appropriate means of collecting data at national, local and individual levels;
- simplicity and keeping bureaucracy to a minimum;
- striking an appropriate balance between robust evaluation and the resources required to gather and analyse the information;
- supporting those who are expected to collect the data through training and an effective mechanism for data entry and collation.

Definitions

To enable evaluation of the contribution of Supporting People services to tackling and preventing homelessness to be based on a common understanding, it is important to define what is meant by 'tackling' and 'preventing' homelessness. It is suggested that the following definitions are applied:

- tackling homelessness – providing people who are homeless with accommodation alongside the provision of housing-related support which addresses at least some of the issues that led to homelessness;
- preventing homelessness narrow definition– enabling an individual/household to maintain accommodation which is likely to be available for occupation by the individual/household for at least 6 months (closely linked to statutory definition from the Housing (Wales) Act 2014);
- preventing homelessness broader definition – reducing the risk of loss of home through eviction, non-renewal of tenancy or repossession, either by reducing risk factors or by building protective factors.

Putting the principles listed above into practice would suggest an approach that involves:

- both quantitative and qualitative data drawn from organisational and service user perspectives;
- maximising the use of existing data sources and processes;
- embedding tackling and preventing homelessness in the new outcomes framework for Supporting People;

- ongoing exploration of the potential for data matching via the SAIL databank to identify the impact of Supporting People beyond homelessness into health and social care, for example;
- providing local authorities and support providers with sufficient notice to ensure they have systems through which they can effectively collect the data and piloting new approaches to ensure that they are tested before roll out to all local authorities/service providers.

Maximising the use of existing data sources and processes would involve:

- for the Welsh Government:
  - o continuation of the piloting of relevant questions on the WHO12 form and the Supporting People outcomes spreadsheet and assessing the results in autumn 2015 with reference to data quality and the usefulness of having two datasets. My observation is that, using the Supporting People outcomes spreadsheet will provide a more complete picture of the contribution of Supporting People to tackling and preventing homelessness than the WHO12;
  - o ensuring any relevant research commissioned on Supporting People and homelessness explores what contribution the Supporting People programme makes to tackling and preventing homelessness.
- for local authorities and support providers:
  - o having open discussions about whether services are preventing homelessness within the local population, e.g. as part of RCC agendas, contract monitoring meetings;
  - o using case studies to provide a consistent narrative about tackling and preventing homelessness, including the service user perspective in relation to what they think would have happened had they not been able to access support.

The above could be implemented immediately with little additional resource requirement.

In relation to the new Supporting People outcomes framework, it is suggested that a core quantitative dataset is agreed for which data will be collected. The dataset could usefully include:

- number of homeless people placed into (temporary) accommodation with support (it might be appropriate to separate those who are roofless from those who fall within the (broader) statutory definition of homeless);

- number of evictions prevented from rented housing where legal process towards eviction had been commenced prior to support starting (suggest this is signalled by the issuing of a legal Notice signalling the intention of the landlord to seek possession);
- number of individuals/household assisted to move into accommodation which is likely to be available for occupation by the individual/household for at least 6 months;
- reduction in rent arrears (measured at start and end of support and either average per case or aggregate figure);
- reduction in debt (measured at start and end of support and either average per case or aggregate figure).

It may also be appropriate to include data on other factors associated with the broader definition of prevention of homelessness. To assess the longer-term impact of housing-related support in preventing homelessness would require tracking individuals/households for an agreed number of months after the support has ended to see if their accommodation has been sustained. While there would be benefits to doing this, it would have significant resource implications.

The new outcomes framework is expected to be in place by April 2016. Significant work will be required in order to develop and pilot the framework before that date. However, the consideration of elements associated with tackling and preventing homelessness should be able to be integrated within this wider work without the need for significant additional resource. It may be appropriate for the quantitative dataset to be piloted with a small number of service providers later this financial year.

There were differences of opinion between key informants as to whether long-term Supporting People services should be asked to provide evidence of their contribution to tackling and preventing homelessness. The quantitative dataset set out above could be equally applicable to both types of service, albeit that for some people the support does not end, so some of the data will not be collectable.

As well as case studies as suggested above, it may be appropriate to gather service user views via a survey of a sample of, or all, service users. As noted by previous evaluations, it is difficult to get a totally representative sample of service users from services which are so diverse and provided to a wide range of individuals/households with very different needs. It is suggested that service users are asked what they think would have happened had they not been able to access housing-related support. Analysis of the responses would then generate a percentage of service users who indicated that they would have been homeless and/or who specifically mention that their risk of homelessness has reduced. To reduce the

resource implications, it should be possible to embed this question within exit surveys for those services that undertake them.

It is not recommended that evaluation of the contribution of Supporting People to tackling and preventing homelessness includes a financial assessment at a national level at this stage. This is due to the absence of agreed costs, the significant number of assumptions that need to be made in carrying out such assessments and the fact that many of the costs in relation to homelessness bourne by individuals, (as opposed to organisations), are difficult to quantify. This does not preclude work being done at a local or regional level by local authorities and support providers to develop an approach for assessing the financial impact of Supporting People on homelessness should some organisations wish to take this approach forward.

Broader issues in relation to Supporting People Outcomes Framework

Although outside the direct scope of this commission, discussions with key informants identified a number of issues which need consideration in relation to developing the new Supporting People outcomes framework.

There is a question as to how closely it is possible, or appropriate, to align Supporting People outcomes with other national outcomes frameworks such as those for Social Services or the combined outcomes framework developed for Communities First, Families First and Flying Start.

There is a need to ensure efficient recording of data through the establishment of a user-friendly database which can be used by front line staff across Wales and which incorporates the agreed quantitative dataset, using yes/no pull down menus where appropriate.

There are currently different approaches to monitoring for Supporting People and Section 180 funding. Section 180 funding has recently been reviewed to ensure projects funded are aligned with the new legislation. There is a question as to whether the two funding streams might be combined. If this is not deemed feasible or appropriate, a common approach to monitoring outcomes would be beneficial, i.e.to use the homelessness elements of the new Supporting People outcomes framework to monitor the outcomes of Section 180 projects.

The development of the new outcomes framework provides an opportunity to move away from prescriptive allowable activities and take a more person-centred approach focused on agreed outcomes.

Some housing-related support services are not funded through Supporting People, but will be working to achieve similar, if not the same, outcomes. Examples include support services provided by housing associations using their own funding and those funded by Health Boards such as the Cardiff YMCA Steps project for people with mental health issues coming out of hospital. There is a question as to whether the new outcomes framework might apply to these services on a voluntary basis.

Evaluating the contribution of the Supporting People programme to tackling and preventing homelessness is not without its challenges. However, it would be possible to put in place an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data, drawing on both organisational and service user perspectives that makes the most of existing data and is embedded within the new Supporting People outcomes framework and which therefore reduces the requirement for significant additional resource.

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Appendix 1 Key Informants

Semi-structured discussions were held with:

- members of the Supporting People and Homelessness teams within Welsh Government;
- Welsh Government officials with research, statistics and data specialisms within housing;
- Cymorth Cymru Board Members;
- members of the local authority National Homelessness/Supporting People Network;
- members of Community Housing Cymru's Supported Housing Services Forum;
- Dr Kerry Bailey.

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