

# The role of research in developing legislation on prevention of homelessness: the Housing (Wales) Act 2014



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# Context

- Wales is small:
  - 3 million population
  - 180 miles north-south
  - Between 70 & 125 miles west-east
  - 22 local authorities
- Devolved powers since 1999, primary legislative powers on housing acquired in 2011
- Ground-breaking homelessness legislation – Part 2 of Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – introduced ‘homelessness prevention duty’

# What research and when?

- Housing identified as priority area for legislation once Welsh Govt gained powers
- 2011 scoping exercise informed commissioning by Welsh Govt of
- 4 linked pieces of research
  - review of working of existing legislation from different perspectives
  - international review of options for legislation & policy
  - developing options for an improved homelessness framework
  - assessment of the impact of proposed changes to legislation
- All with focus on improved prevention of homelessness for a wider range of people than covered by existing legislation

# Research conclusions and influence

- Research reported 2012 – key conclusions:
  - existing services not fully reoriented towards prevention
  - significant geographical variation in support
  - selective provision of services
  - no duty to prevent
- Research recommended substantial changes and scoped options
- Housing White Paper published for consultation May 2012 – significantly influenced by the research – adopted preferred option
- Changes from White Paper to draft legislation influenced by consultation responses, particularly from local authorities
  - deliverability
  - resource implications
- But core components of preferred option made it into legislation

# Part 2 Housing (Wales) Act 2014

- Attempts to prioritise homelessness prevention, **reorienting services**, entitlements and funding
- Makes access to prevention services a **universal right** – challengeable through the courts
- Local authorities must take ‘**reasonable steps**’ to prevent and relieve homelessness and should have recourse to a wide range of different mechanisms of assistance
- Local authorities should consider the most appropriate intervention or range of interventions **for each person**
- Homelessness is prevented if accommodation is available for **at least 6 months**
- Households are also expected to **cooperate**

# Outcomes to date

- 2016/17 – around 28,000 households approach local authorities in Wales for assistance with homelessness/potential homelessness
- Homelessness prevented for 2/3rds despite pressures from ‘reform’ of welfare and increasing numbers of people looking for assistance
- Reduce in use of temporary accommodation
- Recent ‘Homelessness Monitor’ findings on new legislation - ‘a conspicuous success’ in relation to:
  - genuine reorientation to earlier & more effective prevention
  - radical improvement in services to single homeless people
  - spur to positive culture change – local authorities & external agencies
- Development & implementation of legislation documented as case study by Public Policy Institute for Wales
- **But** culture change = process not an event, still variation/inequity in delivery & pressures are increasing

# The various roles research played/is playing

- Research as evidence base for **change** (review of existing legislation and international review)
- Research as engagement tool (review of existing legislation)
- Collaborative research part of commanding broad support for principles of legislation – ownership/recognition amongst practitioners (review of existing legislation)
- Research as part of narrative for culture change in service delivery (options for an improved framework)
- Research as part of narrative about ongoing use of evidence (all elements)
- Research as means of re-grouping/continuous improvement/tracking (longitudinal evaluation)