

# Homelessness prevention: reflecting on three years of pioneering Welsh legislation in practice

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# Overview

1. Challenges in global efforts to implement homelessness prevention
2. The Welsh response
3. A year of implementation: what has worked well & what has not worked well?
4. Conclusions: key learning from Wales

# Challenges in global efforts to implement homelessness prevention

# Global challenges in homelessness prevention

1. Prevention services are not a requirement:

*'While some form of basic service access is usually available to homeless people in Member States, it is not always guaranteed'* (EU Commission, 2013: 17)

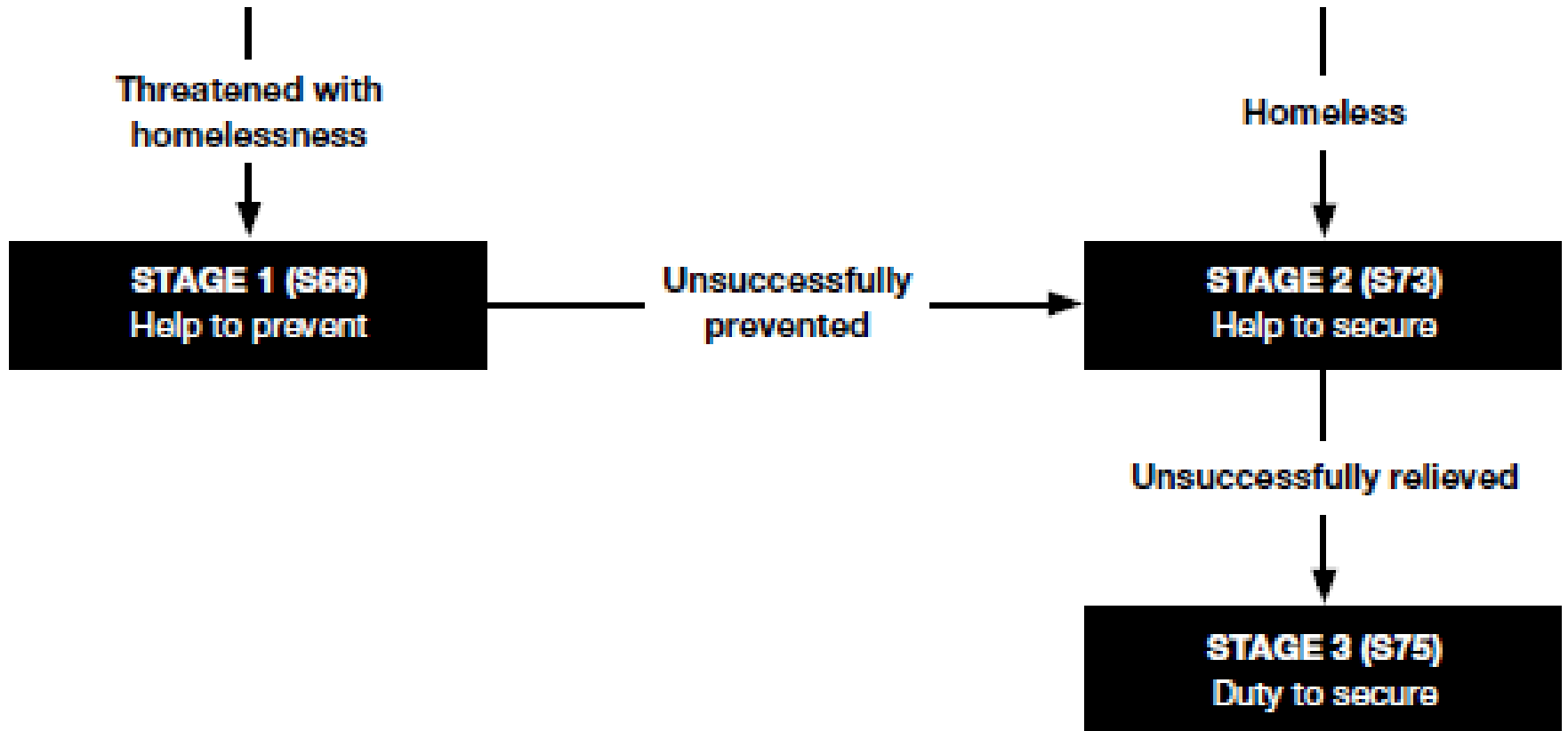
2. Despite increased prioritisation of prevention, systems not fully reoriented
3. Selectivity (exclusion of single people, the 'but for' test etc)

# The Welsh response

# The 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**

# Three main stages/duties



# Interventions local authorities ought to have in place

## **Accommodation-based**

- Options to facilitate access to the PRS
- Arranging accommodation with relatives & friends
- Access to supported housing
- Crisis intervention – securing accommodation immediately

## **Advice**

- Housing Options Advisors
- Specialist advice on benefits and debts
- Independent housing advice
- Employment and training advice

## **Joint working**

- Joint working between Local Authorities & RSLs
- Joint approaches with services such as Social Care and Health

## **Specific population groups**

- Welfare services for armed forces / veterans
- Options for the accommodation of vulnerable people
- Action to support disabled applicants
- Working in prisons prior to release
- Domestic abuse services

## **Support**

- Mediation and conciliation
- Intensive Family Support Teams
- Housing/Tenancy support
- Action to resolve anti-social behaviour

## **Financial**

- Financial payments
- Action to intervene with mortgage arrears

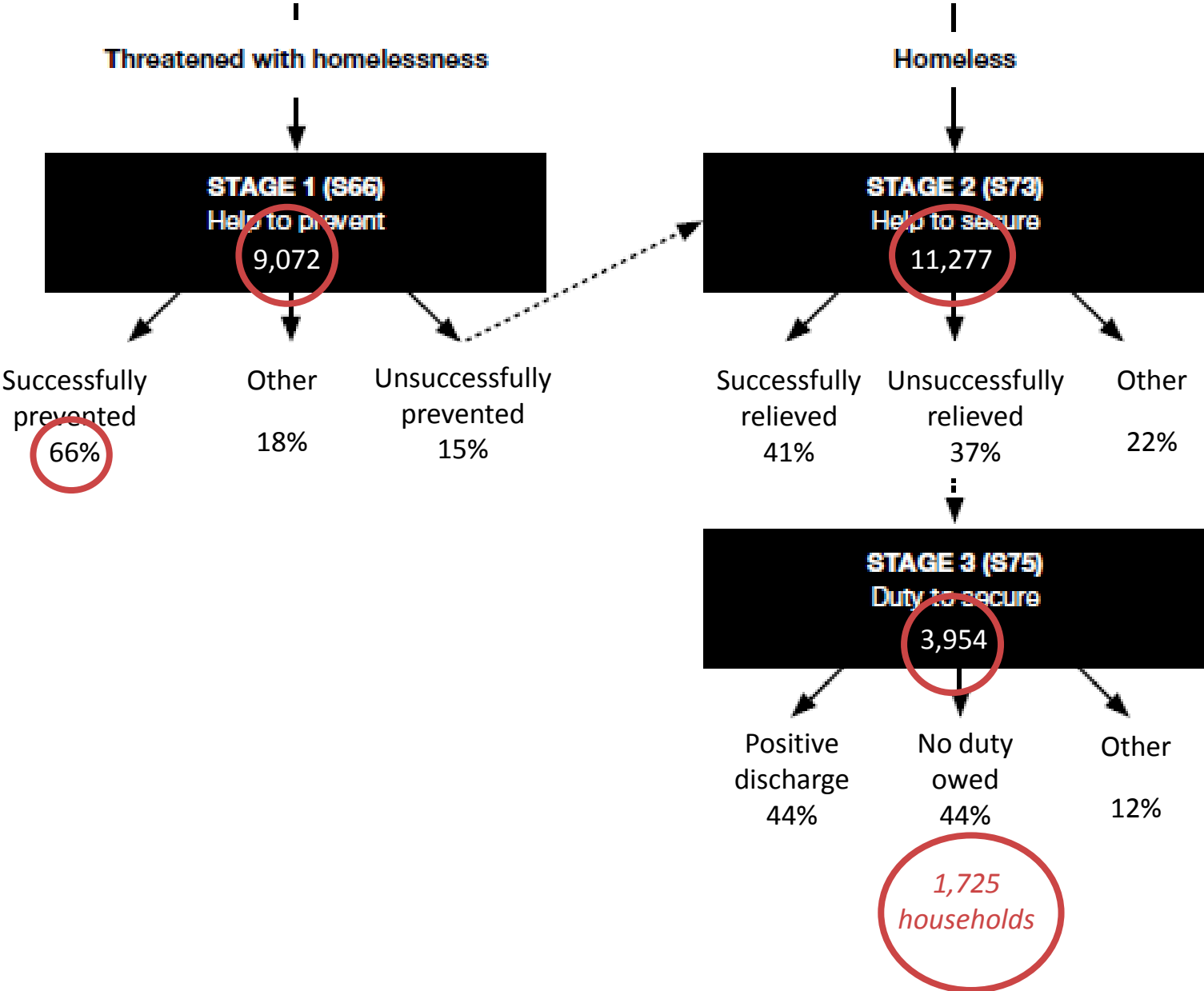


# Three years of implementation\*

\* Informed by 11 local authority and third sector key informant interviews, 50 service user interviews and analysis of aggregated Welsh Government homelessness statistics

What has worked well?

# Earlier, meaningful help & fewer people remain homeless



# Equal outcomes for single people and families (ALMOST!)

**Table.** Outcomes of Homelessness Assistance Provided Under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 By Household Type, 2017/18

	Stage One		Stage Two		Stage Three	
	Help to prevent		Help to secure		Duty to secure	
	Single	Family	Single	Family	Single	Family
Successful	63	69	41	42	31	68
Unsuccessful / non priority	14	17	35	41	55	23
Other	23	15	24	17	13	10

# Service culture

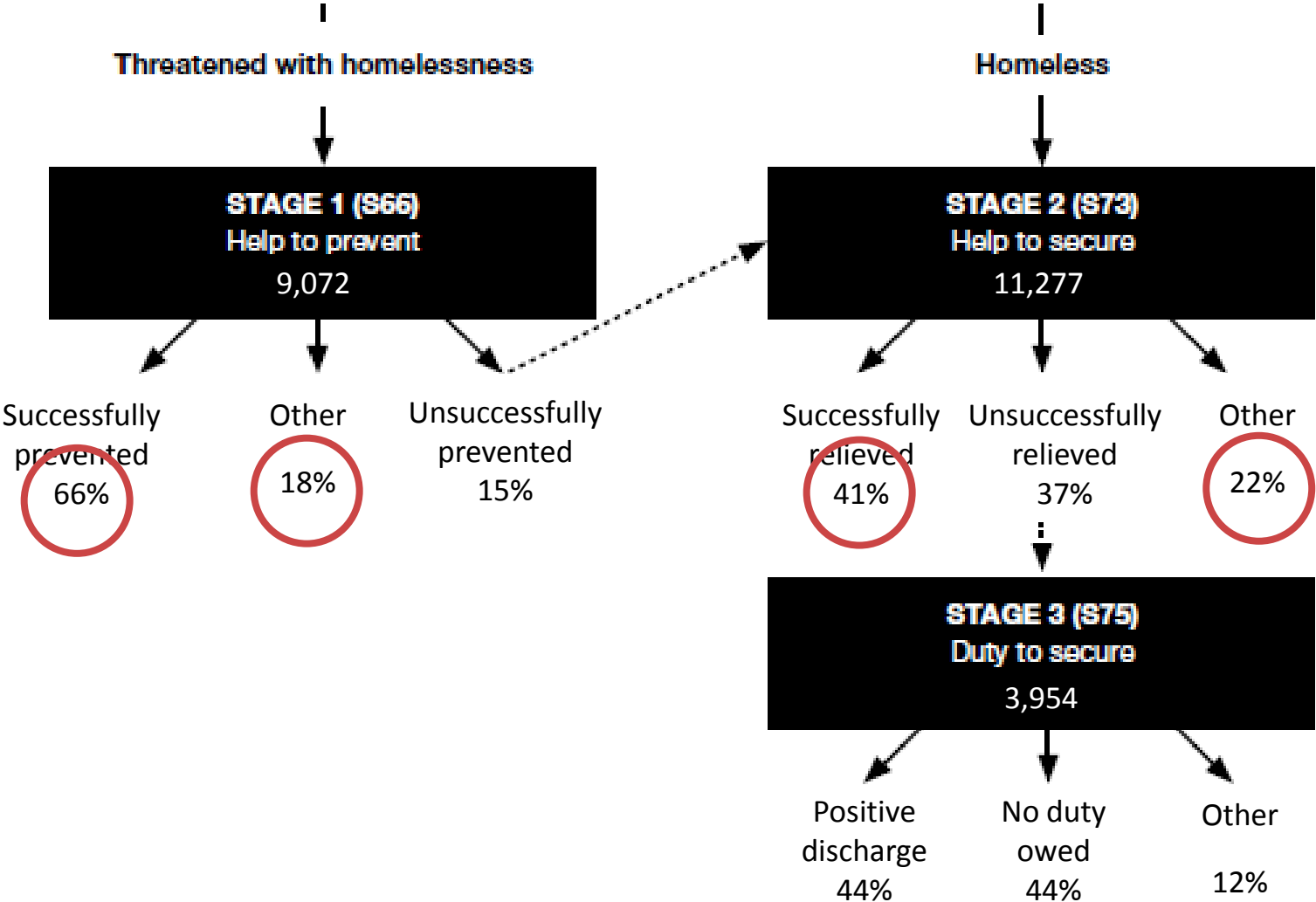
- Positive impacts on **service culture**:

*‘This time round it has been **totally different**. Before I would have had to take my sleeping bag and my flask because you would be there for the duration of the day. The staff would have faces down to their asses, in and out of rooms moaning, you know. This time, totally different. They speak to you on a personal level, a better basis.’ (homeless male, aged 35-39, July 2016)*

- Albeit, there are some concerns that the changes have made the system more **bureaucratic**.

What has not worked well in Wales?

# Less success with homeless & high failure to co-operate



## Standard and limited 'reasonable steps'

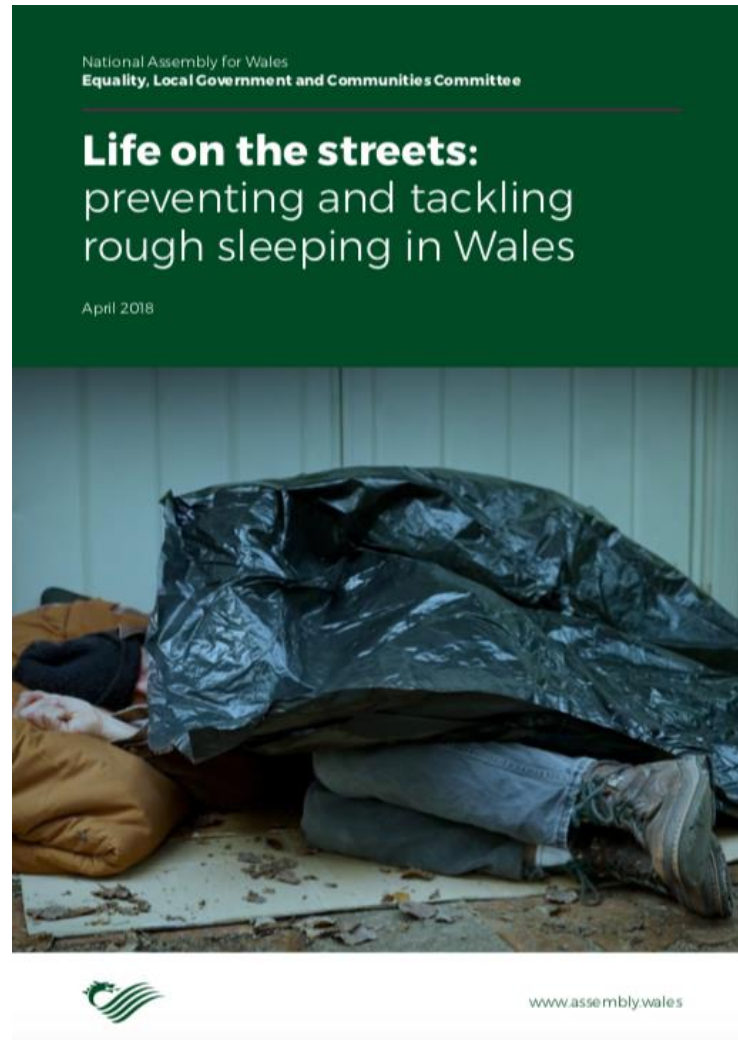
	Homelessness Prevented	Homelessness Relieved	Total	Percent
Private Rented Sector (PRS) Accommodation	1,959	1,077	3,036	39
<i>PRS without landlord incentive scheme</i>	903	498	1,401	18
<i>PRS with landlord incentive scheme</i>	819	579	1,398	18
<i>Negotiation or legal advocacy</i>	237	na	237	3
Social Rented Accommodation	1,353	939	2,292	30
Supported accommodation	273	624	897	12
Accommodated with friends/relatives or return home	156	240	396	5
Mediation and conciliation	171	na	171	2
Resolving Housing and Welfare Benefit problems	153	na	153	2
Resolving rent or service charge arrears	129	na	129	2
Financial payments	96	na	96	1
Debt and Financial Advice	72	na	72	1
Homeownership*	21	3	24	0
Measure to prevent domestic abuse	9	na	9	0
Other assistance or support	207	225	432	6
Total	4,599	3,108	7,707	100



# Inequitable assistance: prison leavers

- Priority need status was removed (from 17% to 3% of priority need cases)
- A new pathway policy was developed but is **not embedded**. Key actors in the pathway were **unaware of responsibilities**
- Typical actions to prevent and relieve homelessness **often unsuitable** for prison leavers
- Claims of **less respectful treatment** – a concern Welsh Government pre-empted given requirements about equal & dignified treatment set out in the pathway policy

# Inequitable assistance: rough sleepers



# Conclusions

## Six lessons from Wales

1. A legal requirement to take steps to prevent homelessness is, in broad terms, an effective tool for reorienting services towards prevention and a step towards realising a right to housing for all.
2. However, we can improve timely referrals into the system – learning from European examples (eg landlord referral on rent payment problems).
3. Moreover, the mechanisms available to local authorities must effectively reflect the needs of all ‘types’ of homeless people (eg. housing first)
4. Placing rights alongside responsibilities is a fair principle, however its implementation in Wales raises unanswered concerns.
5. Legislation alone is insufficient – attention must be paid to implementation and compliance with the intentions of the law (eg. a regulator)

## Some useful reading

Mackie, P. K., Thomas, I. and Bibbings, J. (2017) 'Homelessness prevention: reflecting on a year of pioneering Welsh legislation in practice' *European Journal of Homelessness*, 17(1): 81-107

Mackie, P.K. (2015) Homelessness Prevention and the Welsh Legal Duty: Lessons for International Policies, *Housing Studies* 30(1) pp.40-59

Mackie, P. K. (2014) The Welsh Homelessness Legislation Review: Delivering Universal Access to Appropriate Assistance? , *Contemporary Wales*, 27 pp.1–20.

Thank you

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