

1. Background/HARSAG discussions to date

- 1.1. The HARSAG has been clear that current data collection and recording on rough sleeping does not support joint working at the case level, and is not complete enough to be as effective as it could be in service or policy planning and design, or on tracking trends and measuring the impacts of policy and practice change. We know a key issue for people interacting with the system is better join up between services, and information sharing is key to doing that well. Better management information can ultimately lead to better outcomes for people experiencing rough sleeping and homelessness, including a more efficient and less traumatic passage through the system, better system design and better policy design. Good data are key to communicating the problem, developing the solution and monitoring and managing progress. HARSAG is clear that it wants to provide recommendations in this area which will provide a robust suite of information on the complete picture of rough sleeping and, ideally, broader homelessness in Scotland.

2. Summary of the evidence base

- 2.1. The current HL1 National Statistics data collection in Scotland, while more comprehensive than available LA data in England based on streetcounts, is still only able to present a partial picture of rough sleeping in Scotland largely because it only collects data at the point people make a homelessness application to the LA. This means that we do not have quantitative data on those who sleep rough without ever making a formal homelessness application to the council, or for those occasions where they sleep rough without making an application. However, because in Scotland all unintentionally homeless people are entitled to rehousing it seems likely that this will capture a higher proportion of cases (particularly of single homeless people) than data collection based on homelessness applications made elsewhere in the UK (see further below) – but it will not cover everyone, and certainly not record every time they sleep rough.
- 2.2. Outside HL1, local authorities already collect significant amounts of information about homeless and rough sleeping individuals, for use in their own case management processes. This is the dataset which feeds the HL1 statistics. We could explore the extent to which this information is shared currently and whether it would be possible to share it more effectively (see appendix 2).
- 2.3. The English approach to rough sleeping data is mainly based on streetcounts. As with HL1 statistical returns, these are the responsibility of the LA. However, because most single homeless people are not entitled to rehousing in England, many either do not apply as homeless or receive only a minimal or 'non statutory' service when they do (though this should change under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017). As such, there is not a natural statutory homelessness system-based opportunity to capture data. The counts themselves can be based on a physical count by outreach workers, but much more often (85% of time) are based on an estimate. Because of this and other reasons, including the inevitably incomplete nature of even the most conscientiously undertaken count, given the invisibility of much rough sleeping, the data are not regarded as robust. The UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) does not class streetcounts as National Statistics. These streetcounts are of limited use for policy development and management, and can play no role in case management or individual-level response. Their only

function is to provide a (very imperfect) indicator of trends, and the absolute numbers they generate cannot be relied upon for any purpose.

2.4. Wales also base their national rough sleeping figures on street count estimates though use a different approach England based on a 'two week information gathering period', followed by a 'one night snapshot count' carried out annually by local authorities in partnership with other local agencies. This combined approach is a considerable improvement on streetcounts alone, and there is considerable merit in a rigorously conducted agency survey (see below), but it still cannot provide information as rigorous and complete information as that provided by continuous monitoring approaches (now described).

2.5. A much more robust comprehensive data collection is made by the CHAIN ('Combined Homelessness and Information Network') system operating in London. This system explicitly aims to collect holistic, case level, real time information on rough sleeping in London. It is provided by the charity St Mungo's on behalf of the GLA. St Mungo's describe CHAIN as:

'...a multi-agency database recording information about people sleeping rough and the wider street population in London. The system, which is commissioned and funded by the Mayor of London and managed by St Mungo's, represents the UK's most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping.

CHAIN allows users to share information about work done with rough sleepers and about their needs, ensuring that they receive the most appropriate support and that efforts are not duplicated. Reports from the system are used at an operational level by commissioning bodies to monitor the effectiveness of their services, and at a more strategic level by policy makers to gather intelligence about trends within the rough sleeping population and to identify emerging needs'.

3. Options considered and initial pros and cons

3.1. For the individual, we are seeking to facilitate faster progress through the system towards more personalised rapid rehousing outcomes, and to improve the system as a whole by providing data to support policy development and evaluation. This is an ambition endorsed by the Local Government and Communities Committee in their recent report, though where they advocate better use of the existing data and best practice sharing between local authorities, we are suggesting the existing framework cannot produce the right information in the right way to facilitate joint working or provide a complete picture of rough sleeping in Scotland. The current system of data collection and management needs to change in order to support that because:

- Data do not facilitate inter-agency working on a case by case basis
- It is an incomplete and inaccurate picture, with single sector data sets skewing our understanding and, potentially, misleading us into poor policy choices

3.2. A new solution needs to:

- Allow data to be collected and integrated from multiple, cross-sector contributors (ideally both voluntary and statutory sectors)
- Underpin joined up working by facilitating data sharing, including supporting a named list approach
- Provide sufficient nuance to capture data on different subgroups of rough sleepers/homeless, to facilitate service management and policy development and planning, and monitoring and evaluation of interventions
- Enable de-duplication of records, within and across sectors (via use of unique identifiers)
- Enable a measurement of people with no recourse to public funds

- Provide datasets in such a way as to allow reporting to Parliament, to facilitate scrutiny and hold the Scottish Government to account for its progress
 - Build on best practice from around the UK
- 3.3. A new solution could be an opportunity to:
- Create a better data capture solution for all homelessness measures in Scotland, including things like sofa surfing and those in unsuitable temporary accommodation.
 - Create a suite of evidence which can be used by system designers and policy advisors in many different areas of the public and voluntary sectors.
- 3.4. The holistic and real time approach of the CHAIN database is attractive as it allows for highly granular analysis and is regarded of being accurate and complete. Further work is required on how it works, and what changes might be needed in transferring the system to Scotland – given the different geographies and numbers it will require to be tailored to the Scottish context. Discussions are ongoing with St Mungos and with CHAIN users in London as to what works and what could work for a Scottish context.
- 3.5. CHAIN brings an array of partners together and facilitates joint working. However, it only focuses on rough sleepers. It is highly regarded by subject matter experts and we suggest an option appraisal considers whether a Scottish database could cover both rough sleeping and wider homelessness. HARSAG members are interested in this expansion, but discussions indicate we are more concerned to get the rough sleeping element right first rather than risk creating a more wide ranging system which does not manage the rough sleeping element so successfully. A detailed options appraisal should consider and evaluate these and other alternatives, including opportunities to evolve existing data collections made by local authorities and the third sector (see Appendix 2 for some of these potential alternatives to CHAIN).
- 3.6. It will be key for any new database to generate statistical information on the number and nature of the individuals recorded in it, together with useful reports e.g. around the length of time taken to move to settled accommodation. To ensure maximum impact, these data should be reported to the Scottish Parliament in order to help them hold the Scottish Government to account for progress made towards ending rough sleeping. However, the HARSAG does not believe we should be seeking to set targets using these data, as this can lead to a culture of chasing the target at the expense of the individuals involved.
- 3.7. A new system of this type will take time to develop and implement. In the interim and as part of an overall options appraisal, the Scottish Government should investigate other ways in which the existing data could be enhanced, both in terms of collection and use, seeking to generate both improved service provision and better monitoring and evaluation data in the short to medium term. Alternative indirect approaches to estimating rough sleeping and other forms of core homelessness can be utilised, both as an interim measure pending the development of a new data collection approach, and as an ongoing cross-check on such a system.
- 3.8. A long-running set of questions in the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) ask adults about retrospective experiences of homelessness, with a particular focus on the last two years. There is a specific question on rough sleeping which can be triangulated against the HL1 returns (given questions about whether respondents applied to the local authority). There is duration question which is critical to getting to an average nightly rough sleeping estimate. Adjustments can/should be made for those adults not currently in private households. The downside is that the SHS is only updated annually, and somewhat in arrears, and is only taken from a

sample of households. Therefore, it is not ideal for monitoring the latest trends or the detail of what is happening in particular localities. Unfortunately, too, the homelessness questions were dropped from the SHS from 2015/16.

- 3.9. However, as noted above, Scotland is also fortunate in having an individual-level administrative record of all people/households who apply to local authorities as homeless and in need of assistance (the HL1 return). Comparisons with SHS suggest that about 70% of all people reporting experiences of homelessness say that they applied to the local authority, so it clearly covers the majority of cases (see also the Glasgow data linkage exercise). HL1 data are monitored quarterly and include questions about rough sleeping the previous night and over the preceding three months. These numbers are consistent with SHS based estimates. Therefore, not ideal, it is reasonable to use these as basis for short term monitoring at national and local level until such time as a new data system is developed.
- 3.10. An alternative approach to estimating the number and characteristics of people who are sleeping rough is to conduct an intensive census-type survey of the users of all identifiable services which provide relevant kinds of support to these groups in a locality (e.g. advice services, hostels, homeless drop-in centres, soup kitchens, foodbanks, migrant advisory services, local authority homeless services and Scottish Welfare Fund). This methodology has been used successfully in surveys of Destitution in the UK in 2015 and 2017, and is being actively considered by National Records of Scotland as an alternative to attempting to undertake a street count of homeless people at the 2021 Census. This methodology captures more of groups who are less visible to street counts, because of their geographical dispersal, as well as forms of 'quasi-rough sleeping' which may well not be captured by street counts either (cars and vans, tents, riding around on public transport). It is worth comparing this approach to that taken in Wales in their recent rough sleepers measurement exercise (see above).

4. Considerations for practical implementation

- 4.1. An options appraisal should seek further views from stakeholders as to how to improve the array of data and information sharing on rough sleeping Scotland. In particular, local authorities who manage the current data collection and front line organisations who already have case management systems in place are likely to have useful insights into what information is needed and how to collect and organise it.
- 4.2. A CHAIN type system could require a new IT system to be implemented and managed once running. Full service could also provide analysis of the data and a reporting function, which would enhance the usability of the data would likely mean more value is placed on it as there would be more routes for it to influence policy and practice, and day-to-day case management. These obviously require investment and as such it will be useful to understand the potential to extend beyond those sleeping rough to other homeless households.
- 4.3. Among others, there would be practical issues to resolve around data protection and sharing, including ensuring rough sleepers themselves are comfortable with the services who will have access.
- 4.4. There would be impacts on those who would need to input the data. The existing HL1 data collection is made by local authorities, and we would expect that any new system would not increase the overall data burden though it might change it. Other parties also use various forms of case management system, and it will be important to consider ways of ensuring front line staff do not have to spend extra valuable time inputting data instead of working with and for

their homeless clients. The system should offer efficiencies for front line staff, which will help ensure their commitment to accurate and complete recording.

- 4.5. Simply providing good data is only one half of the equation, it needs to be acted upon. To ensure transparency and maintain scrutiny and profile, the Scottish Government should consider developing a suite of metrics to be included in an annual report to Parliament, so that it can hold the Government to account for progress towards its stated goals.
- 4.6. There are clear risks around setting up a new data collection and management system. Seeking to evolve something which already exists may be easier in terms of making better information available, but since any solution we seek needs to involve data sharing, data protection will be a risk that needs to be managed in such a way that individuals are safeguarded but which allows the data to be used to improve people's experience of the homelessness system and the speed with which they exit it in a sustainable way. Any new system should be 'future proofed', by which we mean straightforward to evolve if the details of the data collection need to be altered and to accommodate new platforms and technologies.

5. Estimated Costs

- 5.1. A rough comparison between HL1 data and CHAIN information for 2016-17 suggests the rate of rough sleeping in London is more than twice the rate per head of population in Scotland, with London having around three times the actual headcount of rough sleepers – although when CHAIN was originally commissioned London figures were lower. Collection aims, methodologies and scale information should be part of the consideration when seeking a proportionate solution.
- 5.2. There are clearly costs to setting up any new database system. 'Evolving' the existing data collection by building on HL1 is likely to be cheaper, but there will be costs attached to bringing in new players and creating safe opportunities for data sharing. We would expect the financial aspect to be considered more fully in the context of an options appraisal and for the Scottish Government to .

6. Draft recommendations

- 6.1. Does the Action Group agree with the below recommendations?

We recommend the implementation of a solution similar to the CHAIN system used in London, to support two aims of the HRSAG – (i) real-time 'by name' data sharing between the agencies working with people who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping, and (ii) enabling frequent and regular reporting of numbers, locations and other data to support monitoring the reduction in rough sleeping across Scotland

To achieve this first recommendation, we recommend that the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) be asked to produce an outcomes framework for homelessness and rough sleeping in Scotland, and a suite of metrics to measure progress towards the aspiration of ending rough sleeping.

We recommend that CHI should further be asked to undertake an options appraisal to determine the detailed requirement of a national 'CHAIN-like' system for Scotland, including the extent to which such a system can build on existing data collection in Scotland.

We recommend that, based on the agreed metrics, there is a programme of regular reporting to the Scottish Parliament to facilitate scrutiny of progress towards ending rough sleeping in Scotland.

We recommend that consideration is given to making a bid for re-instating the homelessness questions in the SHS, given the high policy priority attached to this topic.

Appendix 1: Views on CHAIN

Jeremy Swain, Thames Reach (strategic user of CHAIN on the Mayor of London's taskforce)

- Outreach teams are very committed to putting in data because the data is very well regarded. Case workers have case level data. Day to day it's brilliant
- Can get data on quarterly basis of the full profile of rough sleepers, e.g. 8,108 were met on street in 16/17; 7/10 were new to street, and 8/10 of this group had just one interaction with a worker before going off street
- Can see the rise in longer term rough sleepers
- Can cut by ethnicity/nationality/mental health situation
- Can't solve the problem of rough sleeping without knowing how big it is – CHAIN provides the accurate baseline
- Where we fail - data is so rich and it isn't being used to the fullest extent. It could be used to set in train solutions to problem in the far shorter term or even real time but that isn't happening at the moment. E.g. a particular concentration of new or repeat presentations might show a problem with a particular hostel.
- Asked about whether public sector organisations should be able to access, e.g. police – good thing the police can't get this kind of information or the individuals might be concerned. Not the only means of sharing information with police.
- This kind of data sharing helps professionals in adjacent organisations and local authority areas deliver solutions collectively, minimising duplication and creating a smoother pathway. They still have problems in data collection – e.g. there seems to be some issue with how hostels input data with variations of approach between institutions.

Ian Canadine, St Mungos, CHAIN management team

- CHAIN – set up 2000. Initially commissioned by ODPM, transferred to GLA in 2010.
- Some LA access. LAs do use for service planning etc.
- Police, home office or enforcement agencies having access would be a problem, service users would object. LAs not so much. Data protection: setting your 'purpose' – have asked for sight of their formal purpose and legal basis for collection.
- Hard work to get teams to populate accurately. What would it take to get good data from a busy A&E team? What are people's incentives to do it properly? LAs/commissioners buy in is fundamental.
- The database can definitely improve joined up working, can inform service planning and policy making. Supports campaigning and lobbying.
- Database works because it's layered on top of existing infrastructure
- Annual budget c £215,000. Central team offers training/helpdesk. Data cleaning e.g. de-duplicating. Compliance reports to get services to record. Reporting/analysis function.
- Salesforce based system.
- Definition of verified rough sleepers is the one used by DCLG for street counts but varied very slightly – if someone is sleeping in A&E or a roadworthy car that counts. Questions around fast food or police stations.
- If we were to expanding to wider homelessness we'd need to evaluate data purpose for collection and processing.

Dominic Williamson, St Mungos, CHAIN management team

- St Mungos have a Social Enterprise spin off called Real Systems to set up CHAIN like systems outside London. Ballpark set up costs more likely to be tens of thousands than tens of millions but a great deal depends on design choices.

- On case management – difficult bit is the partnership working and the time and effort goes into getting users to input information properly and use it effectively. This management activity is fundamental, especially from data protection point of view. Have to trust the outreach workers and they have to trust the system. Rough sleepers have to trust how their data is being used.
- They hold regular CHAIN managers meetings – important networking and feedback opportunity.
- Team is always developing the system, e.g. adding mapping and mobile interfaces. In house development function. Flexible cloud based platform allows evolution and helps prevent obsolescence.
- Relationship with GLA – CHAIN team produce reports which GLA publish
- CHAIN drives action. Being clear who the commissioner is helps with this. How do you tie the action owners (mainly LAs) into making change? Requires political oversight and strategic leadership. Other St Mungos work indicates the key factor in an area's effectiveness around preventing rough sleeping is often the strategic/political leadership and active management of housing pathways, e.g. aligning drug and alcohol commissioning with housing.
- Big challenge – tension between the detailed stats requirement for policy development can be in tension with the needs of an outreach worker for their specific case. Front line needs to see the connection between the data they put in and improvements being made system wide.
- Could be opportunity for more real time management of individual cases, some areas are more proactive than others but there is no central management of this.

Appendix 2: Possible Alternatives to CHAIN

A number of potential alternatives to CHAIN could also be considered

1. Some suggestions have been made that it would be possible to create a 'plug-in' to the HL1 database that could provide a restricted-view user-interface for key third sector organisations locally – frontline crisis response services, outreach, day centres and equivalent. An agreed and concise 'core data set' would be inputted by the third sector. At operational level, reporting functions could enable by-names lists to be generated periodically showing patterns of cross-sector service use and everything else required. National analysis would be similar to what is currently carried out by SG, but would then include third sector supplemented core data. Evidence from the Glasgow HL1/ODM datalinkage exercise indicates that third sector recording of rough sleeping tends to be more accurate, while their recording of engagement with statutory services tends to be less accurate. An IT specialist would be required to investigate the practicalities.

2. 'Apricot' is the system used by Edinburgh City Council commissioned services (also by one of the day centres in Glasgow). It is the next generation of the 'ODM' system, and may be similar to CHAIN – shared case management in real-time, plus anonymous data for trends analysis. We would need to investigate how cost and functionality compares to CHAIN

> <http://www.gallerypartnership.co.uk/apricot>

3. There are a couple of existing monitoring systems that a large number of third sector organisations used - not currently connected as common monitoring systems (like Apricot), but are online and real-time and may have capacity for becoming a common monitoring tool. Also not specifically capturing homelessness or rough sleeping basic data, but again might be worth scoping which homelessness key organisations are already using them and if any adjustment/alignment possible.

4. Housing Support Enabling Unit provides an online outcomes monitoring system ('better futures'). More here><http://www.ccpscotland.org/hseu/information/better-futures/>

5. Penumbra host a case management system (I-Roc Digital). More here> <https://irowellbeing.com/cms>