

USING CASE LEVEL DATA TO MEASURE THE DYNAMICS OF HOUSING SUPPORT

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This data insight draws on data from the City and County of Swansea housing team to explore the number of households actively receiving housing support during a financial year.

What we did

This analysis used data from the City and Council of Swansea housing team. Data related to cases for support made by households to the housing team that were 'active' during the 2014/15 financial year, i.e. between 1st April and 31st March. A case was deemed active from the initial date of application to the date of solution, rather than the date a decision was made regarding the household's legal status under housing legislation.

To be active in the 2014/15 financial year, the support either had to have started, ended, or been ongoing throughout the period. Active cases were split into four groups:

- Cases that open and close in the 2014/15 financial year
- Cases that close in the 2014/15 financial year, but open before this period
- Cases that open in the 2014/15 financial year, but close after this period
- Cases that open and close outside of the 2014/15 financial year

Due to small numbers, four categories was the maximum allowed whilst still being able to publish findings.

Changes in how data have been recorded by the housing team mean that only the overall number of cases in 2014/15 can be compared between the new analysis and published statistics. Furthermore, the nature of the aggregate data collection has changed since 2014/15. Statistics in 2014/15 are based on aggregate data of decisions on the legal status of a household made in the reporting period. This differs to the current collection, where cases that close within the reporting period contribute to the count, regardless of when they started.

Background

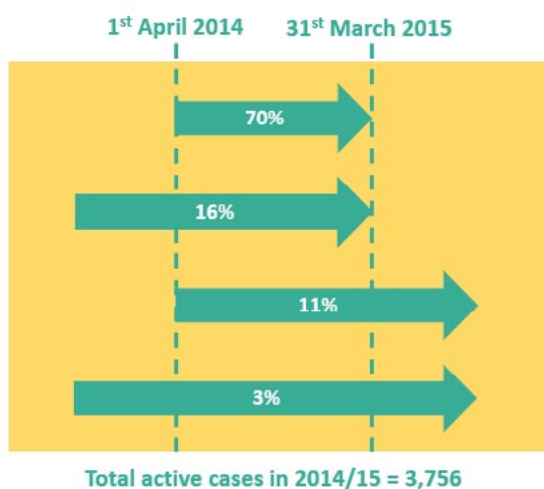
In Wales, information on homeless/at risk households receiving assistance from local authority housing teams comes from aggregate data. These data are collected by Welsh Government from each local authority in Wales¹. As part of the aggregate collection, local authorities process information on cases they have assisted to generate counts of households by pre-specified breakdowns, such as gender, age, ethnicity of the main applicant, and legal status of the household. Missing from the current data collection is any insight into the dynamics of support, specifically the number of unique cases for support that are 'active' within a financial year. In the current data collection methodology, a case for support that ends in a different reporting period is not counted in the current period. The current aggregate data may therefore under-represent the support being provided to households during a given period. In this insight we consider the opportunities of case level data for improving our understanding of the dynamics of local authority homelessness support.

What we found

There were 3,756 active cases of support within the 2014/15 financial year. This compares to the 3,190 cases where a decision was made in 2014/15, reported by Welsh Government from the aggregate data returns², i.e. that were opened and where the legal status of the household was assessed.

By far the greatest proportion of the housing team's activity in 2014/15 related to support that started and ended within the financial year (70%). A small proportion of activity (3%) related to the provision of ongoing support that began prior to the financial year and ended afterwards, i.e. their case has been open for at least 12 months. 11% of support started in the financial year and was carried over into the next financial year. Finally, 16% of support was concluded within the year which started in previous years.

Figure 1: Breakdown of active cases of support, by duration over the 2014/15 reporting period



Why it matters

This data insight has demonstrated one potential way in which the collection of data at a level lower than the local authority, in this case level data, can help generate new insights into homelessness in Wales. Though the analysis presented here was at a local authority level, it could be scaled to provide insight into the dynamics of homelessness at a national level.

Current statistics on local authority housing support may under-represent the amount of support

being given to homeless/at risk households within a reporting period. Furthermore, the aggregate data collection as it is currently structured, does not give insight into the dynamics of support. The current focus on case closures within a financial year means that roughly 14% of the households who are homeless and receiving support may not be accounted for. Within these unaccounted for cases, the presence of particularly entrenched homelessness is of importance for policy and practice, i.e. the 3% of cases that have been open for at least a year.

Though the aggregate collection on homelessness could be adjusted to include information on each of the four categories of 'active support' used to describe the data in this insight, this would generate excess work for already overstretched local authority housing teams. The centralised collection of case level/individual level data by Welsh Government would enable national analysis of the dynamics of homelessness, with a greater degree of flexibility to change measures over time. Welsh Government are currently exploring the feasibility of such a centralised individual level data collection, analysis, and reporting system on homelessness Wales³.

What next?

Given the 3% of cases that were open for at least a year, further data insights will explore the average length of time households receive support, with a focus on factors that may protract the period of support.

References

- ^[1] <https://gov.wales/homelessness-statistics>
- ² <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/Pre-April-2015/decisionstaken-by-area-eligibility>
- ³ <https://seneddresearch.blog/2018/10/04/revolutionising-homelessness-data-in-wales-steps-towards-a-centralised-data-collection-system/>

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