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)