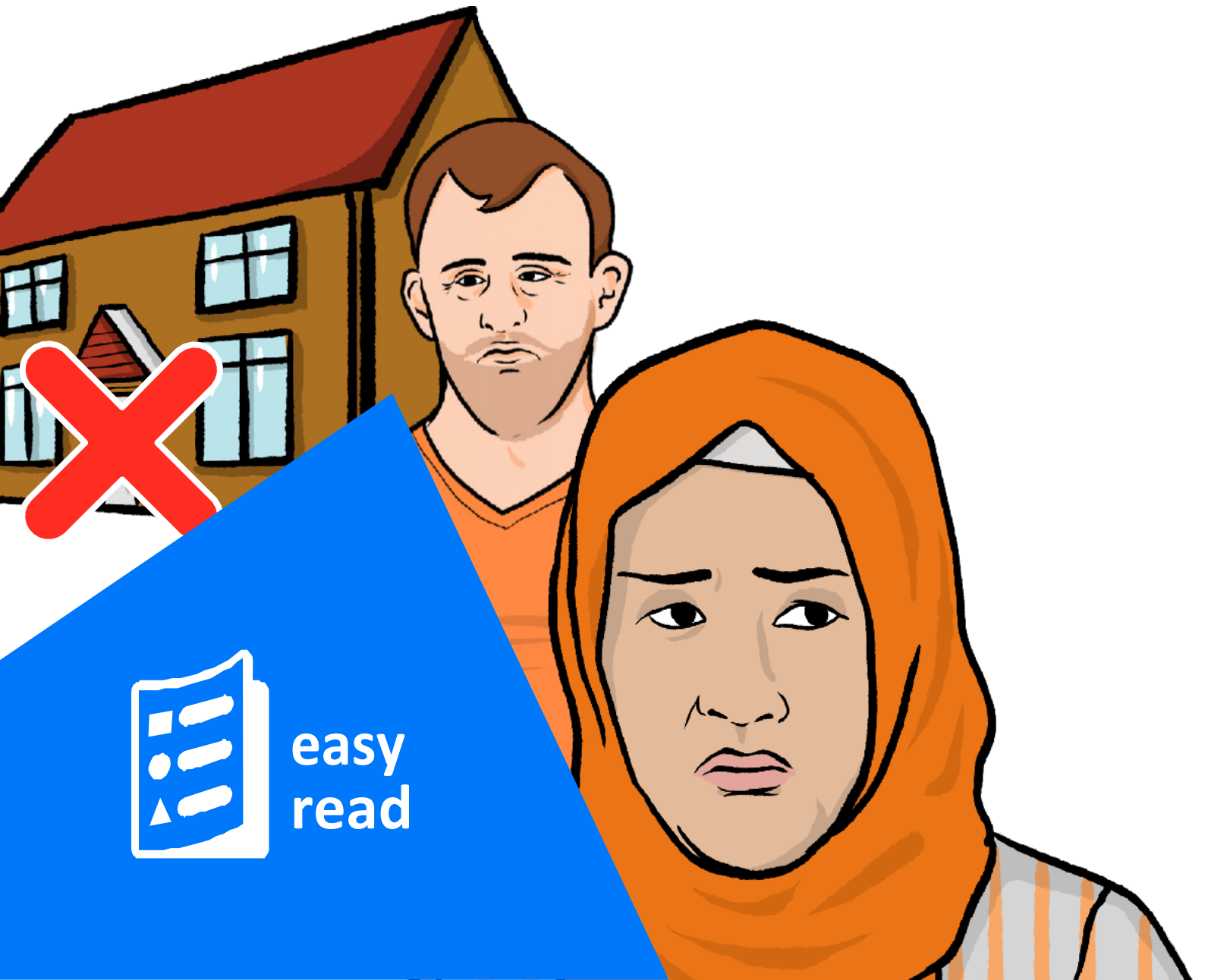


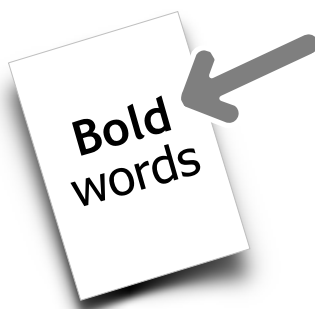
A report about homelessness in Wales



easy
read

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In this easy read document, difficult words are in **bold**. We explain what these words mean in the sentence after they have been used.



Some words are [blue and underlined](#). These are links which will go to another website which has more information.

Introduction



The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) is an independent organisation that deals with complaints about:



- public services - these are services provided by organisations like councils and hospitals.



- local councillors - these are people chosen to run a council.



- public bodies - these are organisations that give services to the public. They get money from the government but are not part of it.



We have been looking into homelessness in Wales. This is a report about what we found out.

About this report



Sometimes we look into a service or organisation because somebody has complained about them.



We did not get a complaint about homelessness. It was our own decision to look into it.



This means we could look at what was happening in more than one council's area.

Homelessness



More and more people in Wales are homeless.



Lots of people are asking the government for somewhere to live.

We looked at some information about **homelessness assessments**.

Homelessness assessments are when the council:



- looks at why someone has become homeless.
- decides if they have to give that person somewhere to live.



We wanted to find out if councils were making the right decisions.

We looked at whether councils were:



- not doing homelessness assessments in the right way.
- not learning lessons after things went wrong.



COVID-19 meant that councils had to do things differently.

COVID-19 is an illness that is spreading around the world. It can affect your lungs and breathing.



Everyone had to stay inside and away from people to stay safe from COVID-19.



This meant it was important that homeless people had somewhere to stay.



We think that looking at what councils did well during COVID-19 could help:

- change how they help homeless people.
- learn about the best ways to help homeless people.

What we looked at



We looked at whether:

- homelessness assessments were being done properly.



- people knew that they could ask for a **review**.

A **review** is when someone else looks at a case again to check the council made the right decision.



If a review says the council were wrong, the council has to help the person.



- councils knew why reviews were telling them that their decisions were wrong.



- councils were learning from what they got wrong.



- councils told people what other options they had if the council wasn't going to help them.



- what councils did during COVID-19 could help them get better in the future.



We looked at 3 local councils:

- Cardiff Council
- Carmarthenshire County Council
- Wrexham County Borough Council

We spoke to:



- homelessness officers. These are people who work on homelessness assessments and reviews.
- the Welsh Government.
- **third sector** organisations.

The **third sector** is another name for voluntary, charity or campaign organisations.

What we found out

We found some things that councils were doing wrong. These included:



- Officers didn't always follow the law around **human rights** and **equality** in assessments and reviews.



Human rights are rights that every person has. For example, the right to be alive and the right to an education.



Equality means treating people fairly and making sure they have the same chances in life.



- Assessments and reviews took a long time.



- Officers missed important things in assessments.



- Officers spoke to people in a way that they didn't always understand.



- Officers didn't think about whether a place was right for a person to live in.



- Officers didn't support people who were in danger of harm or with **complex needs**.



A person with **complex needs** might:

- have more than 1 disability.



- have health problems.



- not use words to talk.



- behave in a way other people find difficult.



We also found some things that people did very well. These included:



- training homelessness officers to think about:
 - people's feelings.
 - people's mental health.
 - whether something bad that happened in a person's life is still affecting them.



- taking part in a project to learn from service users about how to write better letters.



- making a document to give to people with information about what they will do.



- giving people letters that let them know what decision is probably going to be made.



- This gives people time to:
 - find out more information.



- speak to someone to find out if the law can help them.



working with other homelessness services to help people before things get too bad.



- creating a new service to help people who had problems with mental **wellbeing**.

Wellbeing means feeling happy and healthy.

What we learned



All of the councils we looked at found it difficult to get all the information we asked for.



Some of the information was not very good quality.



It is important that there is good information to help:

- officers.

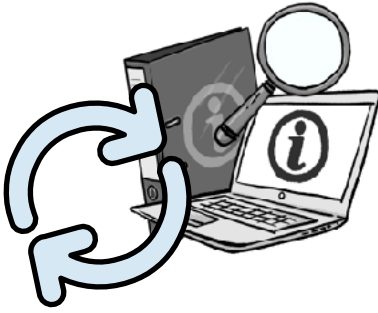


- advocates.

An **advocate** is someone who helps you to speak up, or speaks up for you.



- people who are homeless or might become homeless.



Each of the councils did reviews in a different way.

It could be a good idea to have a Housing Regulator.

A Housing Regulator could:

- support councils.
- make sure everyone works in the same way.
- listen to complaints.



We found that councils were following the law to make sure assessments were done properly.



But sometimes people didn't understand what they were being told.



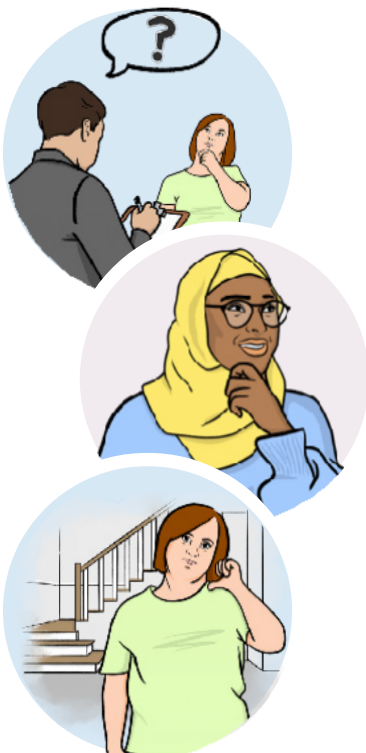
They didn't always know that they could ask for a review.

We think that reviews could be made better by thinking about:



- independence - this means doing things for yourself and making your own decisions.
- getting them done on time.

We think that the reasons reviews often don't agree with assessments is that assessment officers don't:



- ask enough extra questions.
- think enough about a person's circumstances before making a decision.
- think about whether a place is good for the person to live in.

Working on these problems would mean:



- fewer officers making bad decisions.



- fewer people having a review.



- reviews agreeing with assessments more often.



We found that people are often told about other places that they can get help.



But it is often difficult for those people to get that help.



The work that everyone did during COVID-19 was very good.

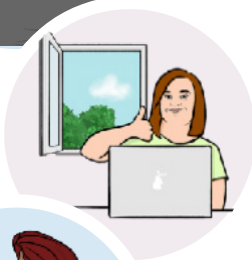


They made sure that everyone had a safe place to stay.

There were lots of changes:



- People stopped having assessments in the same room as the officer.



- People worked from home.



- Everyone used computers and phones more.



The councils solved lots of problems.

This was thanks to the hard work of the officers.

What we think councils should do

The councils we looked at have agreed to:



- make Easy Read versions of information that they give out for:
 - people with learning disabilities.
 - people whose first language is not Welsh or English.



- look at using different ways of letting people know about decisions. For example, texting them.



- think about people's mental health when talking or writing to them.



- remind officers to properly look at information they are given.



- make sure everyone is given training on equality and human rights.



- include officers who do reviews in homelessness training.

We think that the other local councils in Wales should:



- talk to each other about making reviews better.



- work with other organisations to make services better.



- help officers to make decisions that don't have to be reviewed.



- learn from the changes the 3 local councils we have looked at are making.

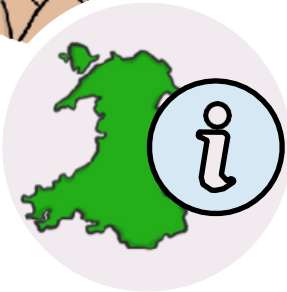


We also think that the Welsh Government should:

- look at helping everyone to work in the same way.



- make sure officers always think about human rights and equality in assessments and reviews.



- make information the same everywhere in Wales.



- look at making it easier for people to **appeal** a review's decision.

An **appeal** is when you don't agree with a decision and ask for it to be changed.



- create a Housing Regulator to support councils to work in the right way.



We have not looked at the Welsh Government or the other local councils.

Our suggestions to them are just ideas to get better.

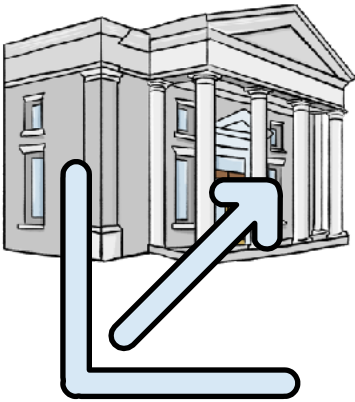


We will work with those local councils and the Welsh Government in the future.

Thank you



Thank you to everyone who helped the Public Services Ombudsman to look into homelessness.



We think that councils will get a lot better if they learn from what we found out.

For more information



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