

Homelessness prevention in Wales

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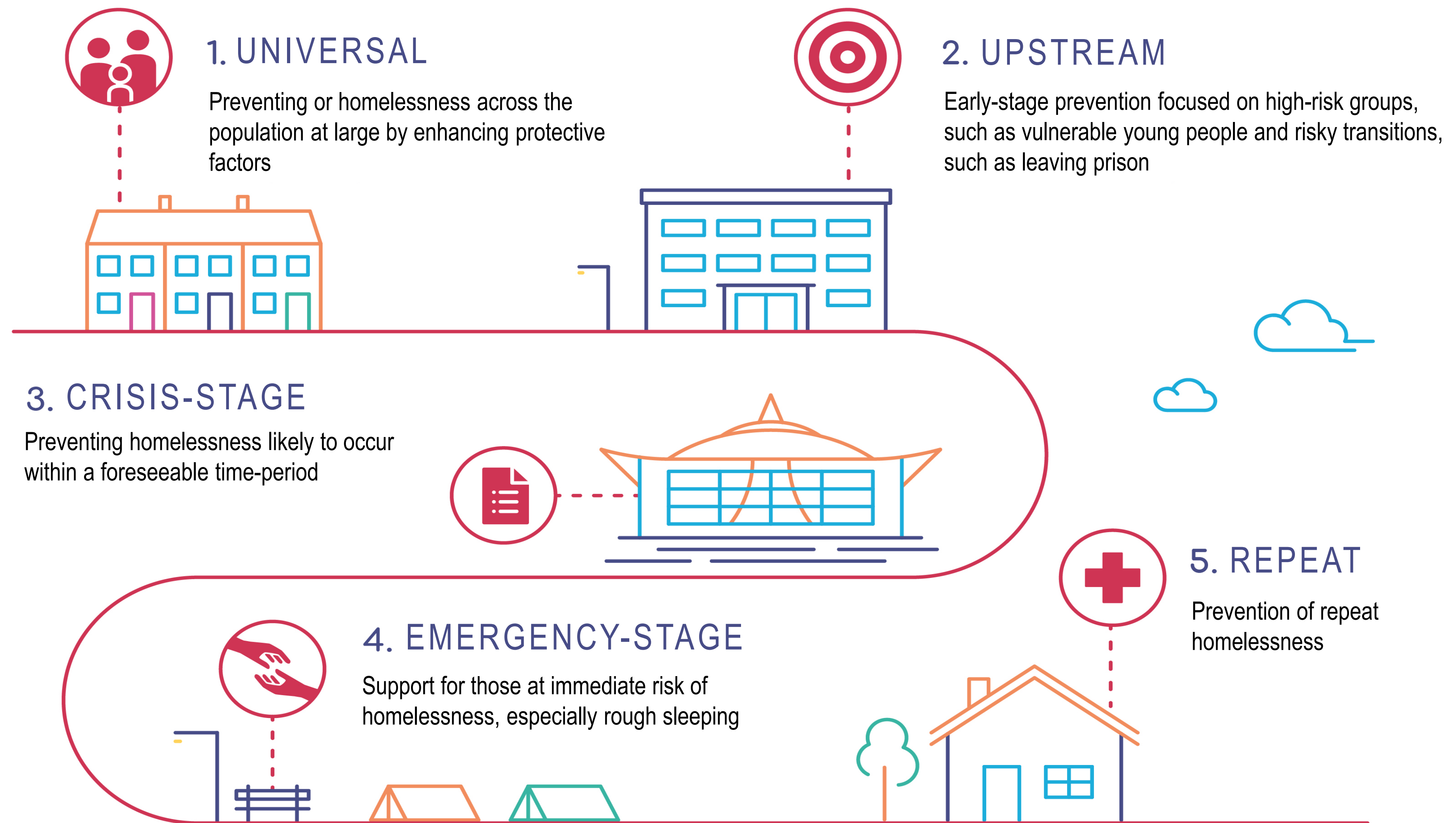
Overview

1. A typology of homelessness prevention
2. The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977
3. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014
4. The Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill
5. Key lessons from Wales



Part 1

A five-stage typology of
homelessness
prevention



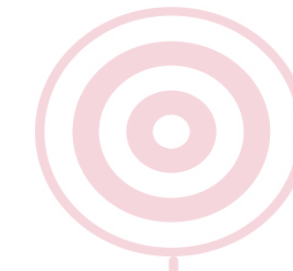
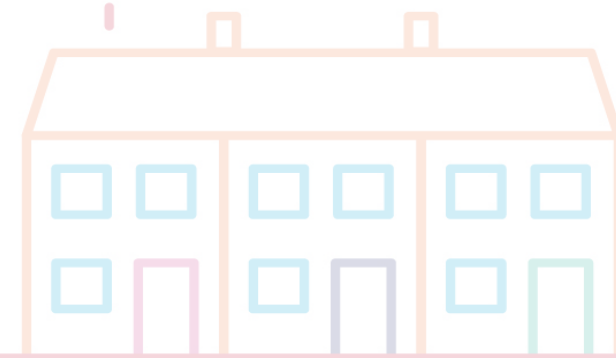
(Fitzpatrick et al 2021, Mackie et al 2024)

Part 2
The Housing
(Homeless Persons) Act
1977



1. UNIVERSAL

Preventing homelessness across the population at large by enhancing protective factors



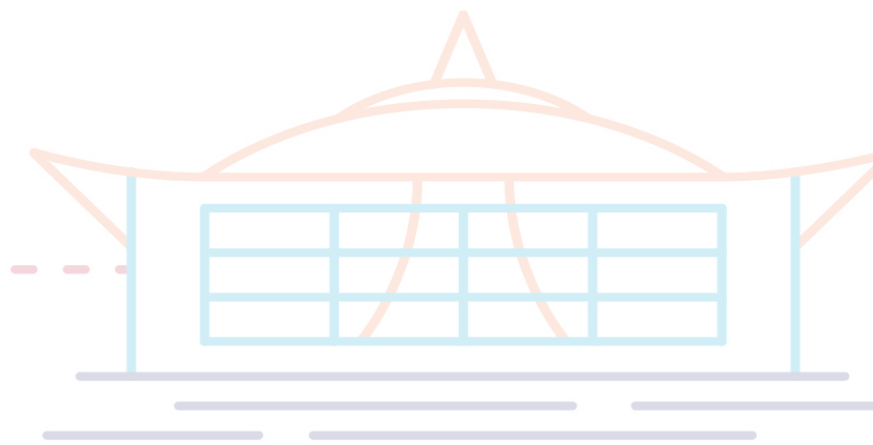
2. UPSTREAM

Early-stage prevention focused on high-risk groups, such as vulnerable young people and risky transitions, such as leaving prison



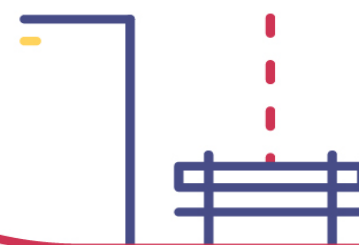
3. CRISIS-STAGE

Preventing homelessness likely to occur within a foreseeable time-period



4. EMERGENCY-STAGE

Support for those at immediate risk of homelessness, especially rough sleeping



5. REPEAT

Prevention of repeat homelessness





A safety net for families

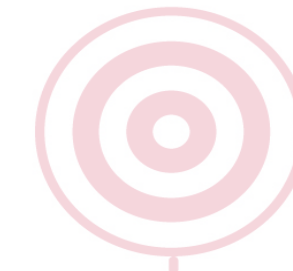
- A **public outcry** sparked by a TV drama in 1966.
- **Existing guidance** for local authorities to place responsibility on housing departments - recognising homelessness as a structural issue - had been **ineffective**.
- The **1977 Act** required local housing authorities to ensure **settled accommodation** is available to homeless households in priority need - mainly **families with children**.
- Crucially, this created '**individually enforceable rights**'.

Part 3
The Housing (Wales)
Act 2014



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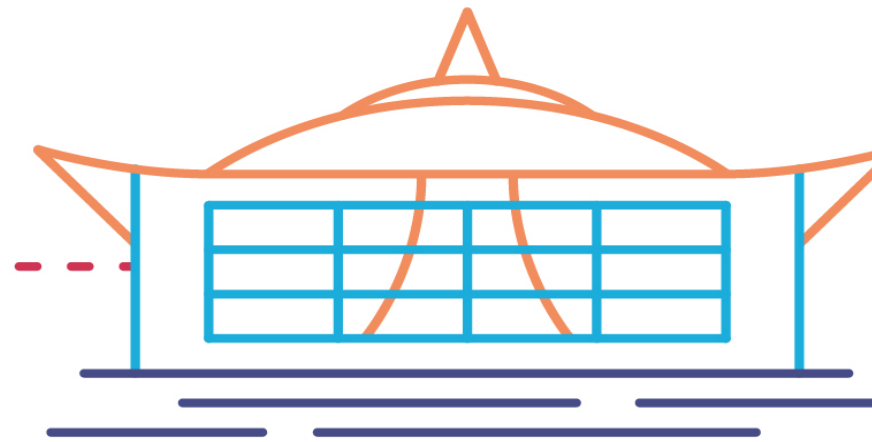
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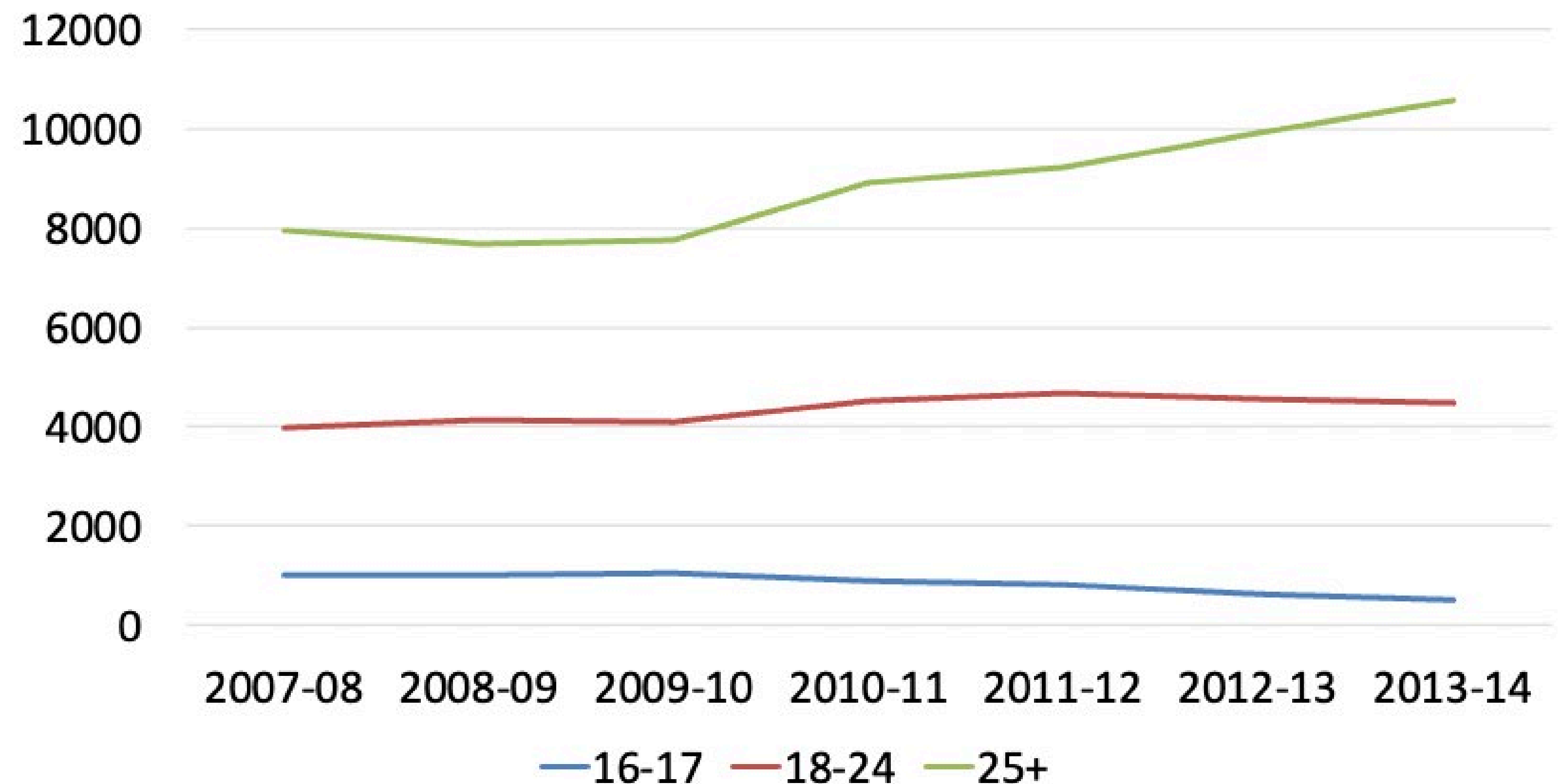
Context

- Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 – **largely unchanged** since inception.
- In the early 2000s, homelessness **prevention** emerged alongside the statutory system.
- Until 2006 (realistically 2011) Wales had no primary **law-making powers**.
- The **ten-year plan** published in 2009, alongside **primary law-making powers** granted in 2011, laid the groundwork for significant reform.
- The plan included a **commitment to review** the legislation.



Continuing high levels of homelessness

Figure 1. Homeless households owed a duty to provide housing in Wales, 2007-2014



Legislative review findings

- **Emergency focused** - managing homelessness.
- An unequal, **‘all or nothing’** (Priority Need) system.
- Despite increased prevention services, there was evidence of:
 - **Underdeveloped services**
 - **Selectivity** and gatekeeping
 - Considerable **geographical differences** in support
- Support for more diverse and **flexible interventions**.
- Widespread support for a **prevention duty**.

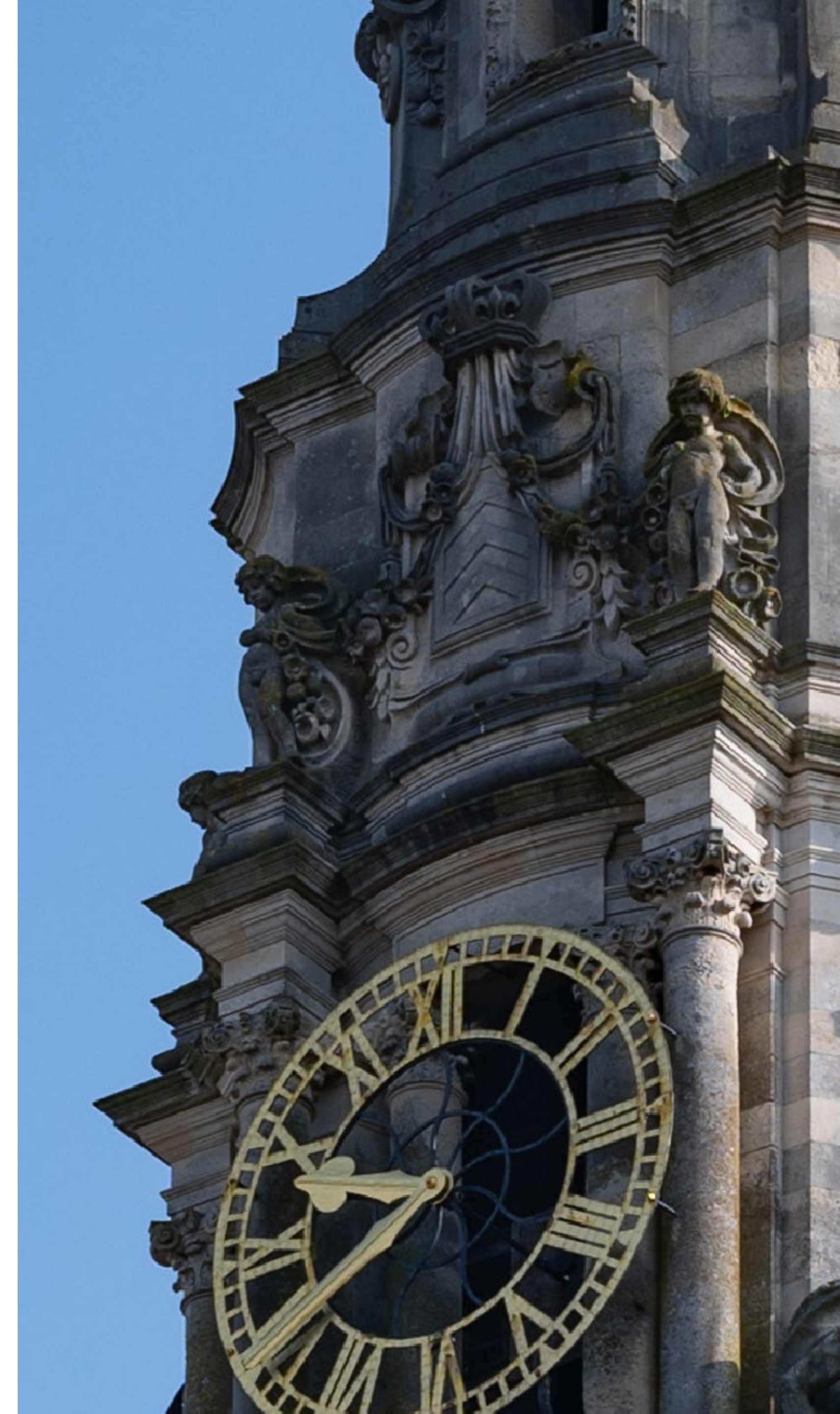
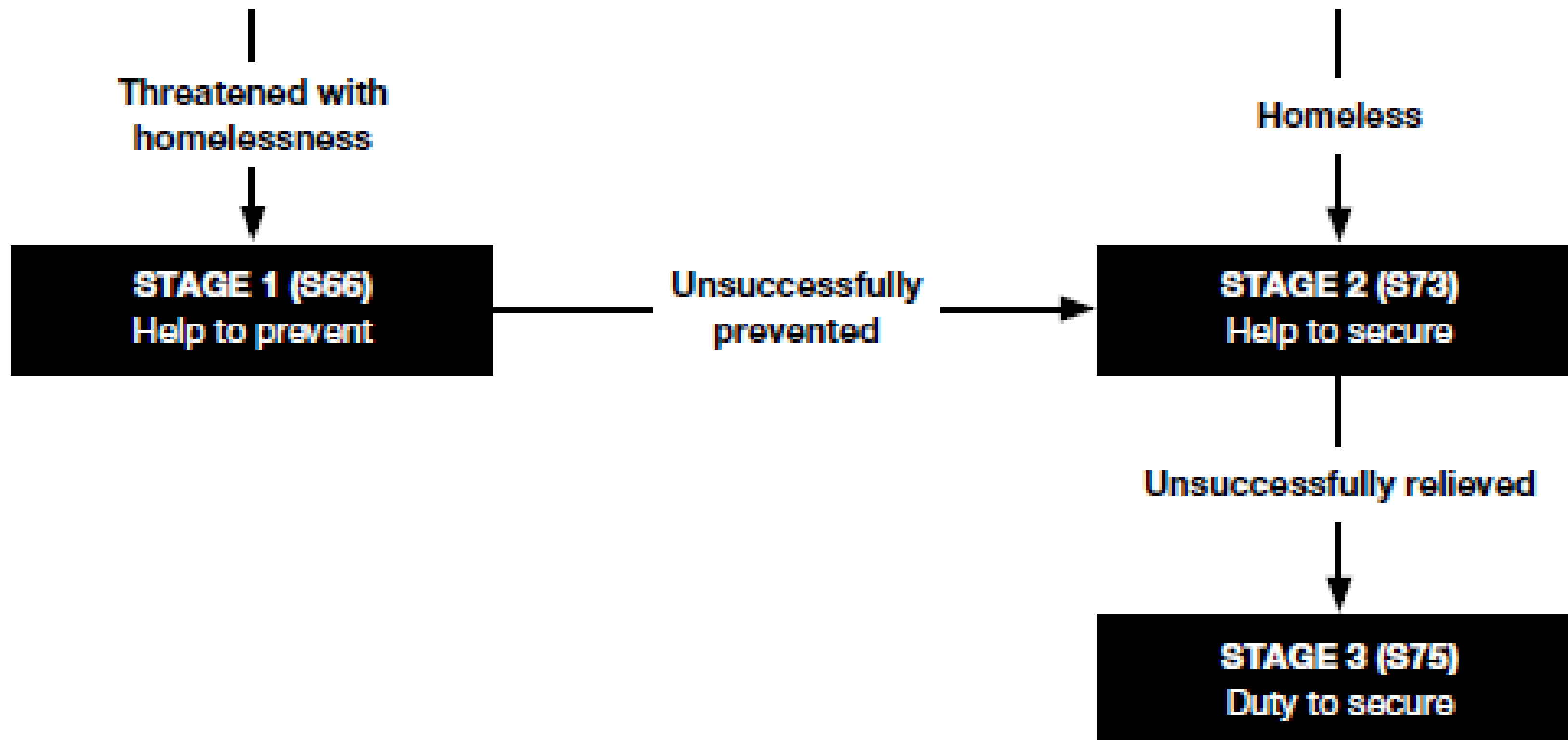




The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

- Attempted to **prioritise homelessness prevention**, reorienting services, entitlements and funding.
- Access to prevention services is a **universal right**.
- Local authorities must take ‘**reasonable steps**’ to prevent and relieve homelessness and **should** have recourse to different mechanisms of assistance.
- Local authorities should consider appropriate interventions for **each person**.
- Homelessness is prevented if accommodation is likely to be available for **at least 6 months**.
- People are also expected to **cooperate**.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014



A photograph of a classical building facade, featuring a large column and a relief sculpture of a figure. The image is partially obscured by green foliage in the top left corner.

Interventions local authorities *ought* to have in place

Accommodation-based

- Options to facilitate access to the PRS, including rent-in-advance payments, bonds etc
- Arranging accommodation with 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 Social Care, Health etc

Specific population groups

- Welfare services for armed forces / veterans
- Support for 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 ASB

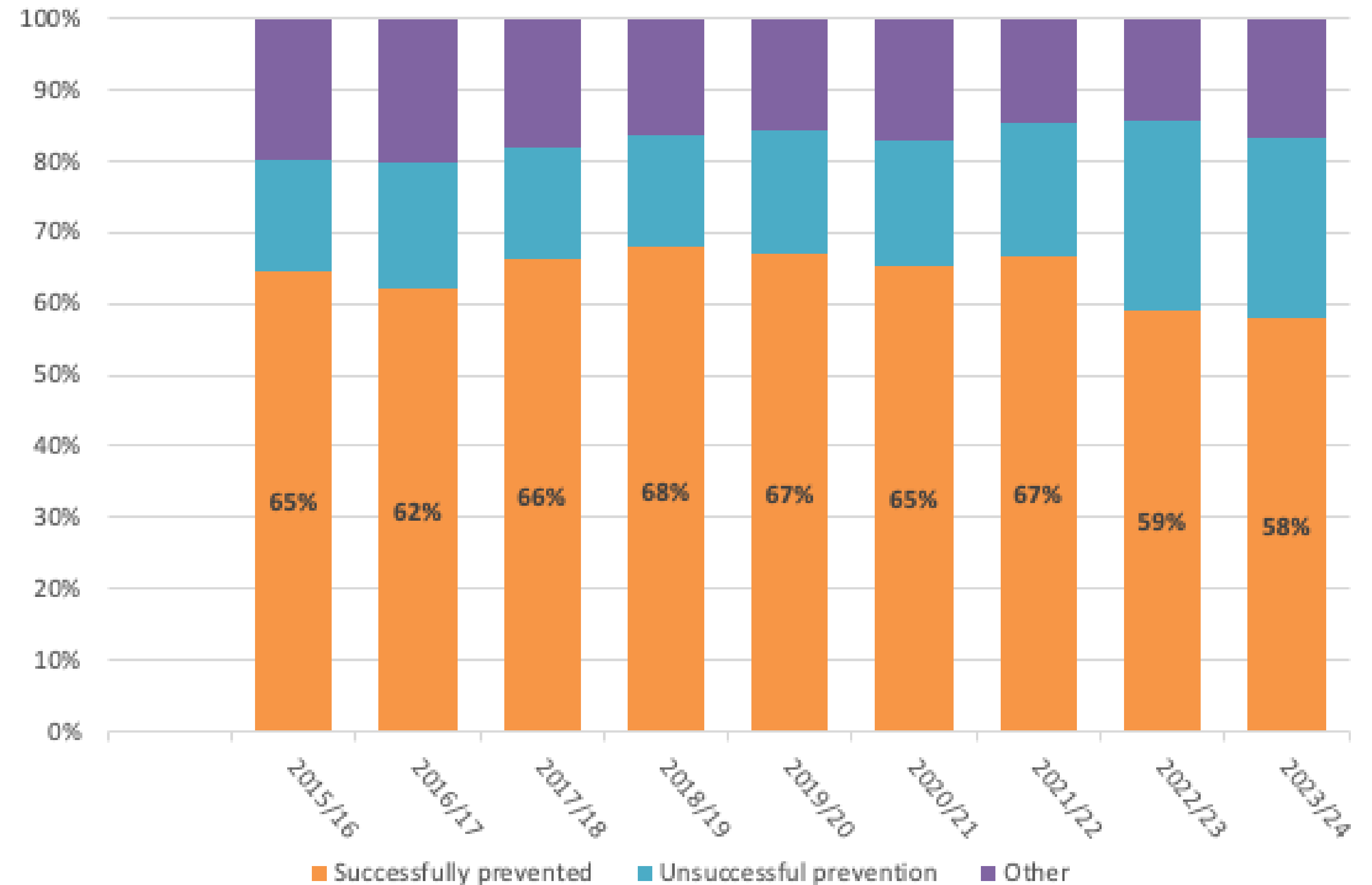
Financial

- Financial payments
- Action to intervene with arrears



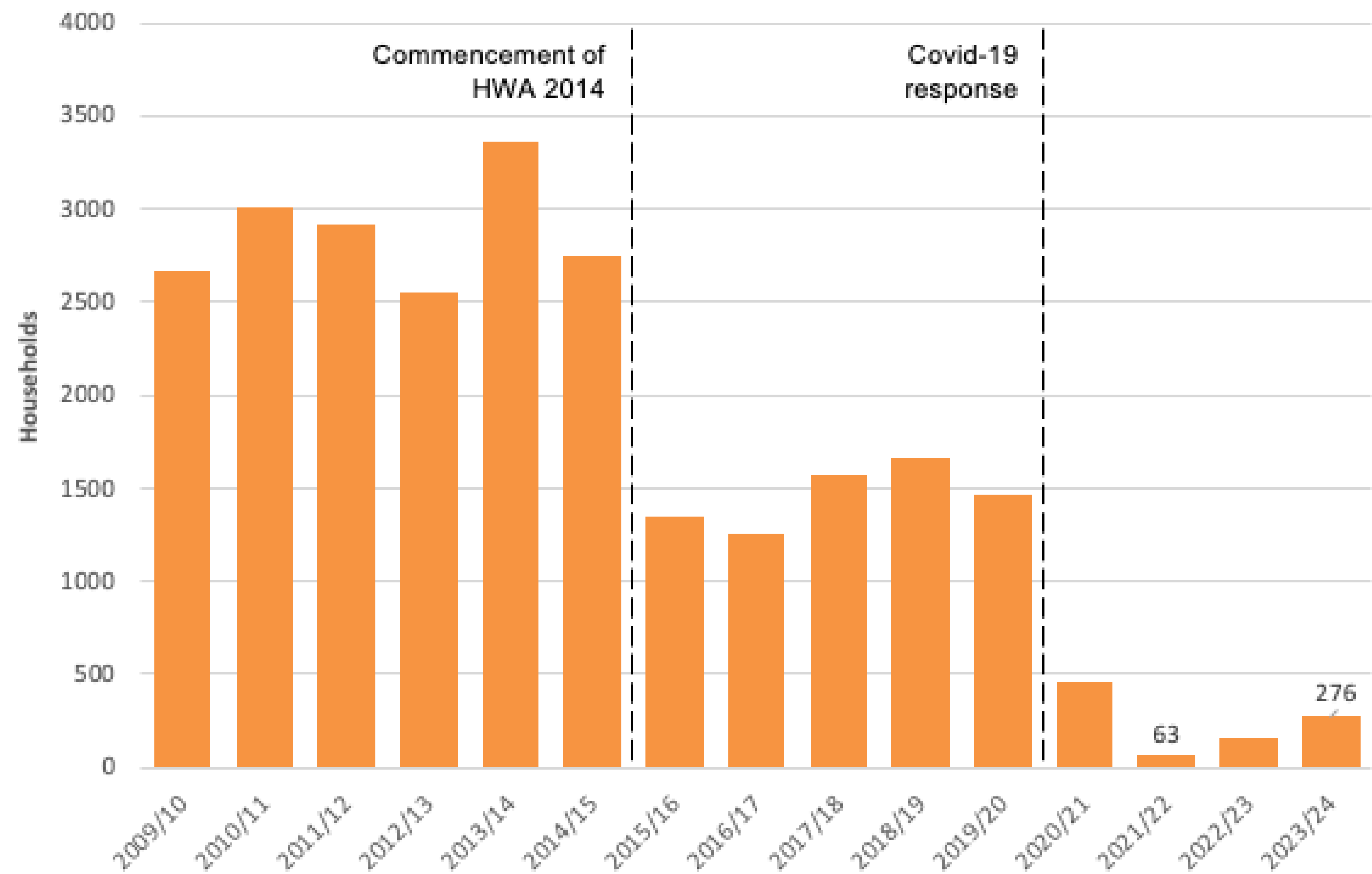
Homelessness prevention outcomes

Figure 1. Statutory homelessness prevention outcomes in Wales, 2015/16-2023/24



An extended safety net

Figure 2. Households determined not to be in Priority Need in Wales, 2009/10-2023/24





Equal outcomes (almost)

Table 1. Outcomes of Homelessness Assistance Provided Under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 By Household Type, 2021/22

Service culture change

‘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.’

(male, aged 35-39, July 2016)





Implementation challenges

- A need to act earlier to:
 - Increase applications for help at an earlier stage.
 - Ensure action by wider public services.
- Standard and limited reasonable steps.
- Responsibilisation of individuals (vs paternalism).
- No regulator.
- Wider structural challenges in public spending, social welfare, and access to affordable housing.

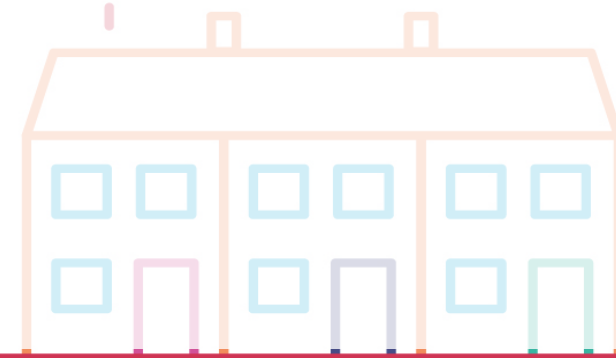
Part 4

The Homelessness &
Social Housing
Allocation (Wales) Bill



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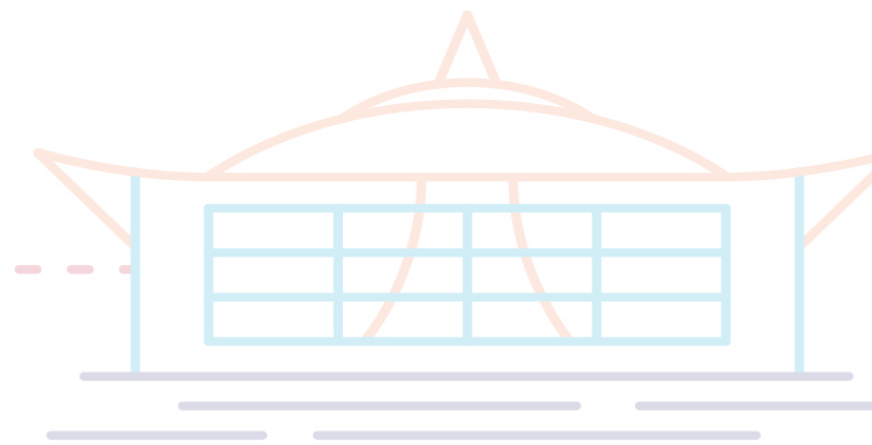
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Context

- We are not all two pay cheques away from homelessness.
- Some groups are at an **elevated risk**, including those leaving state institutions.
- People who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, often come into contact with multiple public services before approaching local authority housing teams, creating **opportunities for earlier upstream intervention**.





Ask and Act

- Following recommendations of expert review panels, legislative changes underway in Wales (and Scotland).
- A new duty to on public bodies to **identify, act, refer, and co-operate**
- Social services, health boards, prisons, social landlords, and job centres are included.
- Making representation to UK Government regarding Department of Work and Pensions, Home Office etc
- Also, **full extension of the safety net** - abolition of the Priority Need test.

Part 5

Conclusion

Key learning from legislation in Wales

- Directs resources for the long-term
- Protects resources
- Promotes equity and fairness
- Establishes accountability
- Empowers citizens and promotes dignity
- Drives service culture change
- Wider structural challenges hamper effectiveness



**Preventing homelessness is
challenging when the sector is
busy saving lives at point of
crisis — but **only a focus on
prevention will put us on a path
towards ending homelessness.****



Diolch
Thank you