



South Wales Street Based Lifestyle Monitor 2017-18

An analysis of people living street based lifestyles in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Bridgend between November 2017 and October 2018



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Summary and Recommendations

Context, Aims and Scope

- People living a 'Street Based Lifestyle' (SBL) are people who spend most of their time on the streets. This includes those sleeping rough, individuals who are spending time in emergency or temporary accommodation, or are otherwise unsuitably housed.
- The Wallich runs Rough Sleeper Intervention Teams (RSITs) in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, and Bridgend. They provide hot drinks, food, and signposting to appropriate support, to people living street based lifestyles in their areas of operation; they also collect data about the people they engage with.

Data Collection

- This data comes from the period 1 November 2017 – 31 October 2018.

The Data

- The full report contains visually formatted data from the Rough Sleeper Intervention Teams.

2017-18: Additional Context

- In 2018, Wales experienced unusual weather: snowfall early in the year, and a record-breaking heatwave during the summer. These conditions affected the day-to-day lives of people on the streets, and may have had health consequences.
- After some uncertainty, Welsh Government committed to ring-fencing vital funding for homelessness services. We welcome this decision; however, given the damaging nature of rough sleeping and the fact that it is still increasing in Wales, we urge

policymakers and commissioners to make a long-term commitment to prioritising and protecting services for people sleeping rough.

- Housing First is an approach to support entrenched, complex cases of homelessness, which has demonstrated positive results worldwide. The Wallich has been delivering a project that adopts this regimen in Anglesey for several years. Welsh Government has now officially endorsed Housing First as a key part of its homelessness policy.
- The Wallich is continuing its organisational rollout of the 'PIE' (Psychologically Informed Environments) approach. PIE refers to provision of support based on an awareness of a client's psychological context. One of The Wallich's residential projects – which operates from numerous dispersed properties – has adopted PIE, and all staff at the organisation are participating in PIE training.
- The Wallich continues to host the Street Homelessness Information Network (SHIN) project; local authorities and other organisations will be able to use this system to store and retrieve data about people on the streets across Wales.
- In April 2018, the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee published its 'Life on the Streets' report, based on a consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders. The report discusses ways to prevent and tackle Welsh rough sleeping; The Wallich supports most, if not all, of the recommendations.

Analysis and conclusion



Individuals living street based lifestyles are more likely to be male; males make up an average of **63%** of clients seen by an RSIT.



South Wales RSITs supported **2,833** people in 2017-18, a **9% increase** on the previous year.



The number of contacts across South Wales has risen by **62%**. People are being seen by the RSITs more times than previously, which might suggest an increase in entrenched rough sleepers, even in areas where the number of individuals seen by an RSIT has dropped.



An average of **85%** of clients seen by an RSIT are sleeping rough.



The number of people brand new to an RSIT averages **31%**.



The average age of clients across all RSITs is **42**.



Client-contact ratios give some idea of how many times each individual engages with an RSIT in a given period. The average ratio is **1:18**.

The **36-50** age bracket is the **most represented**.

The **16-17** bracket is the **least represented**.



Large increases in Bridgend could be explained by the opening of new floor space facility - people can stay there for an unlimited amount of time with no return restrictions. This facility relieves the need to sleep rough and sofa surf, but it also appears to remove the pressure and requirement to work with services to move on to more permanent accommodation.



The increase in the oldest age bracket might result from increased barriers to long-term accommodation, simply meaning people are growing proportionally older as they are on the streets for longer periods. However, it should be noted that the **250%** increase in the top age bracket comes from an increase in small numbers (from 2 to 7).



In Cardiff, the increasing use of tents in the city centre means that individuals are more visible to the morning RSIT service. The tents, however, are acting as a barrier to more permanent accommodation because people stay in them for long periods rather than accessing the relevant services.



The lack of affordable accommodation is mentioned by staff at most of the RSITs as being an important factor when it comes to increasing numbers and/or increased entrenched street-based lifestyles. Similarly, the RSITs also mention changes to the benefit system and the introduction of Universal Credit as having an impact.



Newport RSIT staff have had considerable success with transitional funding, which enables them to provide support finding accommodation, and support in maintaining a tenancy, for a small cohort of clients (of eight housed, five are still currently in accommodation). This might account in part for the reduced numbers seen by the Newport RSIT, as some people are being offered this support. As discussed elsewhere, however, the increased number of contacts points to more entrenched rough sleeping.



Recommendations



Welsh Government and other organisations in Wales should continue to promote **Housing First** as an effective solution for entrenched homelessness, and to develop Housing First initiatives. Supported housing is a vital part of today's homelessness provision in Wales. We recommend a wider rollout of Housing First, which has a robust evidence base, to ensure Wales can provide **a range of effective services for different clients**.



Wales needs much more **affordable housing**.



Different agencies (housing, health, criminal justice, and so on) need to work together more effectively, and focus on **trauma-informed approaches** to providing support.



Welsh Government should ensure that funding aimed at rough sleeping in Wales is **protected and prioritised in the long-term**.



Enhanced Harm Reduction Centres

(where people can use drugs in medically supervised conditions) would be an effective way to reduce dangerous litter on the streets, encourage safer injection practice, and provide users with clear support options to reduce drug use.



As the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's report recommended, the **abolition of the 'priority need'** system in Wales, if it were replaced by one in which everyone living a street based lifestyle gets the support they need when they need it, could improve the rough sleeping situation immeasurably.



More mobile service provision is needed across Wales – particularly in hard-to-reach or rural areas, as well as those with reduced access to services. Additionally, mobile support can be provided during out-of-hours periods. The Wallich's Welfare Vehicle is an example of this kind of approach.



Readers of this report can use the **'StreetLink'** service to make local authorities aware of people seen on the streets, so that they can be offered support. Alerts can be made to StreetLink via telephone on **0300 500 0914**, a downloadable smartphone app, or the website.

**Street
Link**

Section One: Context, Aims and Scope

The Wallich is a homelessness charity that works across Wales. By providing a range of support, it aims to get people off the streets, keep people off the streets, and create opportunities for people to realise their full potential.

This South Wales Street Based Lifestyle Monitor, covering 2017-18, presents an up-to-date and in-depth picture of people living a street based lifestyle in various parts of South Wales.

The Wallich runs Rough Sleeper Intervention Teams (RSITs) in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, Bridgend and Wrexham. The Rough Sleeper Intervention Teams operate each morning on weekdays (and on weekends in Cardiff), providing hot drinks, food, and signposting to appropriate support and accommodation, when it is requested, or when a client seems ready to engage with support services. RSITs operate primarily in the city centres of their respective locations and visit areas where those living street based lifestyles are known to congregate or bed down. They also investigate new referrals, providing early intervention to individuals new to homelessness, making them aware of the help that's available.

While carrying out this work, the teams also collect statistics. This data is vital if we are to understand homelessness, rough sleeping, and street based lifestyles in Wales today. Our service users are more than numbers, but the more we understand how many people need to use our services, and other services like them, the more able we are to make effective policy recommendations to influencers in both local and national government.

Homelessness and rough sleeping are problems recognised by many in Wales: this has been explored and detailed in other documents published by The Wallich¹. Representatives of local and national government across the political spectrum, third sector organisations, and indeed the general public, have all shown commitment to tackling these issues. Perhaps the clearest example of the political will in Wales to tackle homelessness is 2014's Housing (Wales) Act², which prioritises the prevention of homelessness, and puts more emphasis on using the Private Rented Sector to provide accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. Similarly, local authorities are working in more innovative ways with organisations, like The Wallich, to provide solutions to homelessness and rough sleeping in their specific contexts.

This report focuses on providing a quantitative picture of street based lifestyles in South Wales. Other work The Wallich has done goes into more detail about the context of homelessness across the country, and the funding mechanisms organisations like The Wallich use to provide support services³. This Monitor is more like an extension of the monthly and quarterly RSIT reports published on The Wallich's website⁴.

This report is the second that The Wallich has produced covering all the South Wales RSITs. The first covered the period November 2016-October 2017⁵.

¹The Wallich, "Support that Saves", accessed January 28, 2019,

https://thewallich.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Support_that_Saves.pdf

²"Housing (Wales) Act 2014", accessed January 28, 2019, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/7/contents/enacted>

³The Wallich, "Support that Saves", accessed January 28, 2019,

https://thewallich.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Support_that_Saves.pdf

⁴The Wallich, "Rough Sleeping Statistics", accessed January 28, 2019, <https://thewallich.com/rough-sleepers-statistics/>

⁵The Wallich, "South Wales Street Based Lifestyle Monitor 2016-2017", accessed January 28, 2019,

https://thewallich.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/South-Wales-SBL-Monitor-16_17.pdf

Prior to this, we produced two reports covering Cardiff for three years⁶, and a report covering Newport for two years⁷. That said, we have created quarterly reports for all our RSITs over at least the past year⁸. By continuing to report on Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Bridgend together, this time for the period covering November 2017-October 2018, we can build on our in-depth picture of street based lifestyles in South Wales. The Wrexham RSIT continues to provide more limited data, which is recorded in a different way, and as such is not comparable to the other four. Because of this, data from Wrexham remains out of the scope of this exercise.

As before, some basic analysis of the data is provided, as well as some comparisons with the previous year. This document then makes some recommendations for policymakers, influencers, and other stakeholders – this is something previous versions of this research have not done. In the past, we reasoned that we just wanted to present the data we had. However, doing just that and nothing more belies the fact that The Wallich has had another year of experience supporting clients both on and off the streets, and has a lot to offer the policy debates. This, coupled with the continued increases in rough sleeping, makes us feel we need to speak out when it comes to potential solutions. As such, the final section of this document includes some proposals; these proposals come from the data presented here, as well as other experiences that The Wallich's staff and clients have had over the past year.

What is a 'Street Based Lifestyle' (SBL)?

People living a 'Street Based Lifestyle' are people who spend most of their time on the streets. This includes those sleeping rough, but also individuals who are spending time in emergency or temporary accommodation, or are otherwise unsuitably housed.

A note on our service users

It must be emphasised that as an organisation, we do not view the clients and service users we engage with as mere numbers – whether they are clients that engage with our RSITs, or residents in our supported accommodation. However, as previously mentioned, the more we understand street based living in Wales, and the more data we can collect about it, the more informed our proposed solutions will be.

Other sources of data

It is worth noting that the Welsh Government carries out its own research into homelessness⁹ and rough sleeping¹⁰. The latter is most similar in nature to what this document is trying to achieve, although it is important to recognise that not all people living a street based lifestyle are sleeping on the streets, as our statistics will show.

The Welsh Government's methodology differs from ours, for logistical reasons. The methodology used to create this report is explained in more detail in the next section, but it is based on the fact that our Rough Sleeper Intervention Teams operate regularly and frequently. The Welsh Government carries out two annual counts, both in collaboration with Welsh local authorities. One of these takes place over the course of one night, while the other lasts two weeks. While the difference in methodologies is likely to lead to different results, readers who are interested in developing a complete understanding of the statistical work in this area should also examine the Welsh Government data.

⁶The Wallich, "Cardiff Street Based Lifestyle Monitor 2013-2015", accessed January 28, 2019, <https://thewallich.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Cardiff-SBL-Monitor.pdf>; The Wallich, "Cardiff Street Based Lifestyle Monitor 2015-2016", accessed January 28, 2019, https://thewallich.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Cardiff-SBL-Monitor-15_16.pdf

⁷The Wallich, "Newport Rough Sleeping Monitor 2013-2015", accessed January 28, 2019, https://thewallich.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Newport-RS-Monitor-13_15.pdf

⁸The Wallich, "Rough Sleeping Statistics", accessed January 28, 2019, <https://thewallich.com/rough-sleepers-statistics/>

⁹StatsWales, "Homelessness", accessed January 28, 2019, <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness>

¹⁰Welsh Government, "National rough sleeping count", accessed January 28, 2019, <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-rough-sleeping-count/?lang=en>

Section Two: Data Collection

The Wallich's RSITs record information about the service users they engage with each day. This data is recorded using The Wallich's in-house system.

By running reports in this system, we can generate the numbers, tables and graphs that appear in this document, covering each of the four South Wales RSITs. We can then outline the comparisons that make up the following section, contrasting different variables from the different parts of South Wales, as well as comparing this year's data with last year's.

This report continues from where the previous SBL Monitor finished; that is, the data comes from the period 1 November 2017- 31 October.

A note on the different RSITs

Some RSITs operate on a different timescale to others. While all the RSITs go out on weekdays, the Cardiff RSIT, for example, operates on weekends too. The RSIT in Bridgend often works six days a week, but which six days those are sometimes varies. The remaining teams go out on a more fixed five-working-day basis. This will clearly impact the size of the dataset from the different areas; if, for example, Cardiff includes Saturdays and Sundays, while other RSIT teams do not operate on these days, Cardiff provides more data.

To sum up, it is important for our readers to be aware of small differences in the datasets from each RSIT, and the potential effect these differences could have. Ultimately, when it comes to homelessness and rough sleeping, obtaining high-quality data is difficult at the best of times; it is our view that we should not let small variables like this affect a valuable exercise.

Section Three: The Data

A note on the data

This data only refers the number of people who engage with our own Rough Sleeper Intervention Team, rather than the local authority's figures which represent data captured across all rough sleeping services.

The phrase 'people sleeping rough' refers to contacts with individuals we know were sleeping rough. Other contacts are likely to be vulnerably housed, sofa surfing, or living in hostels.

The 'brand new' clients refers to contacts with individuals for the very first time. Note that 'brand new' and 'rough sleeper' clients can overlap as individuals might fall into both categories.

The number of 'contacts' is the number of times the RSIT have offered support to individuals, and as such, the same individual might have been offered support several times. As such, the 'ratio of clients to contacts' gives a rough idea of how often individuals are seen.



From November 2017 to October 2018, the Cardiff RSIT recorded contacts with **1,977** clients.



This is a **22%** increase in clients compared with 2016-2017.



Contacts

9,781

This is a **47%** increase in contacts compared with 2016-17.

Ratio of clients to contacts:



Gender breakdown 2017-18

765 male
(39%)



151 female
(8%)

1061 unknown (54%)



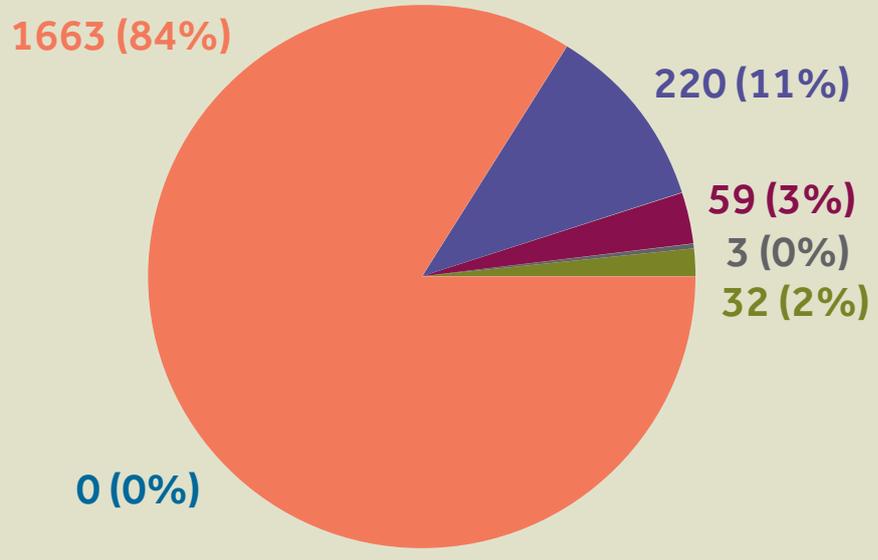
Average age 2017-18

Average age of client
(‘Unknown’ ages affect averages)

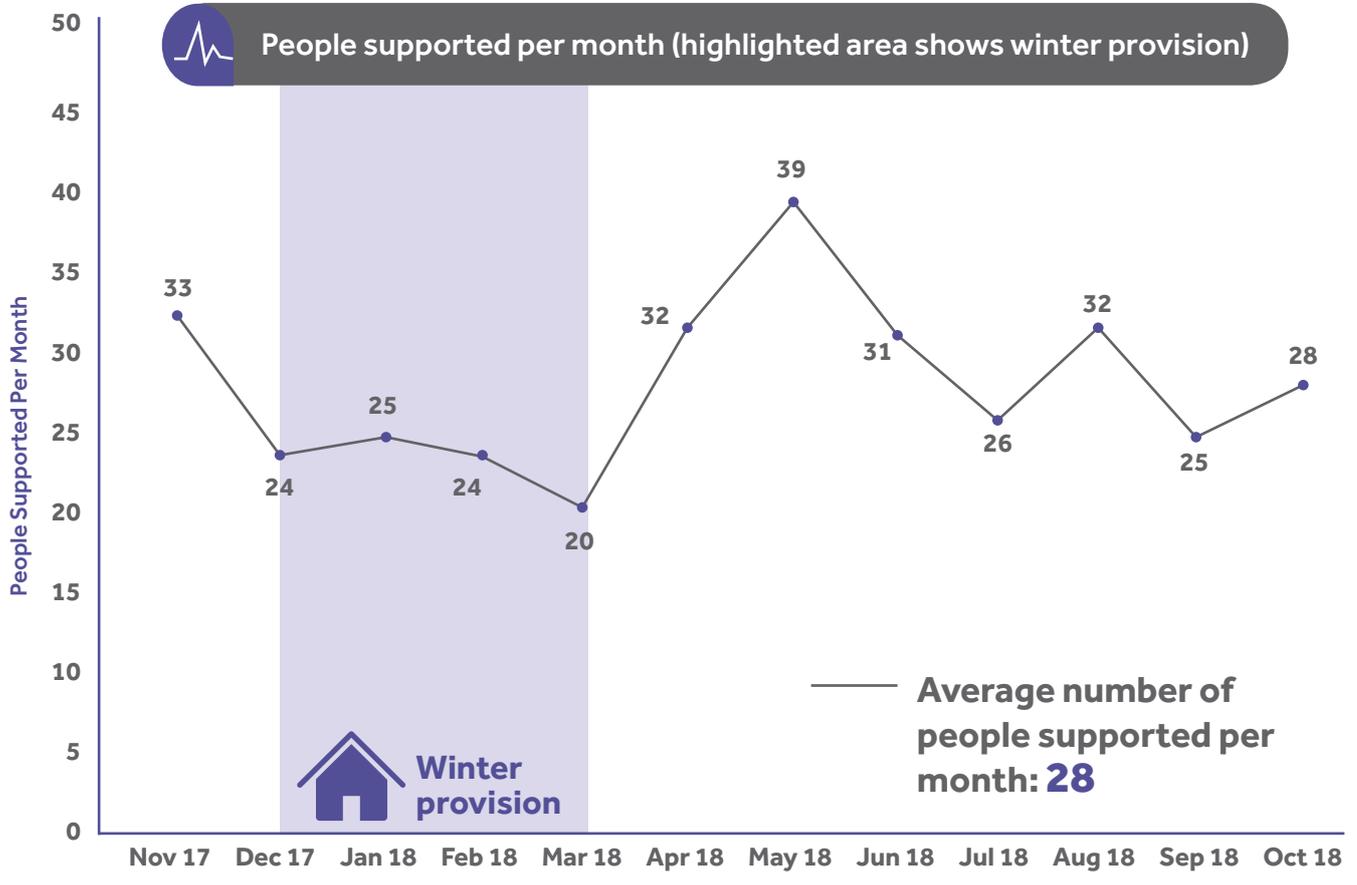


Age breakdown

- 16-17
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-50
- 51-64
- 65+



People supported per month (highlighted area shows winter provision)

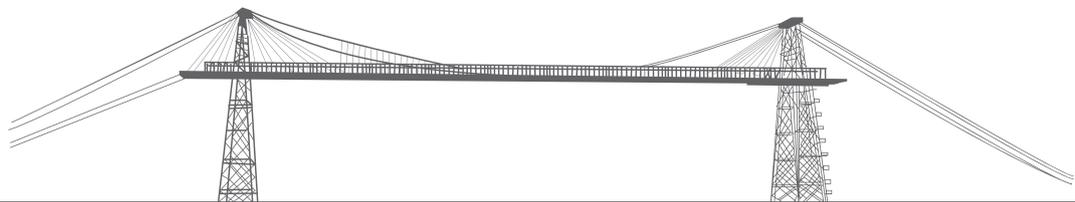


Total number of brand new contacts:
150 (8%)



Total number of people sleeping rough:
1,951 (99%)

Newport



From November 2017 to October 2018, the Newport RSIT recorded contacts with **312** clients.



This is a **17%** decrease in clients compared with 2016-2017.



Contacts

8,709

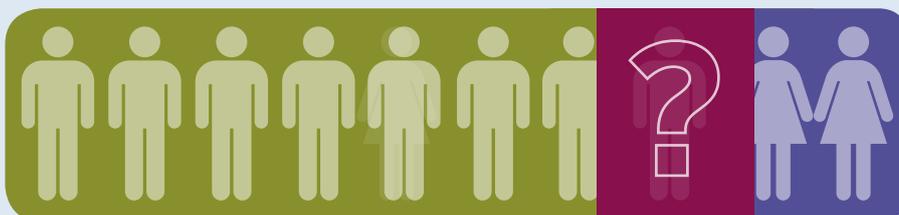
This is a **90%** increase in contacts compared with 2016-17.

Ratio of clients to contacts:



Gender breakdown 2017-18

195 male
(63%)



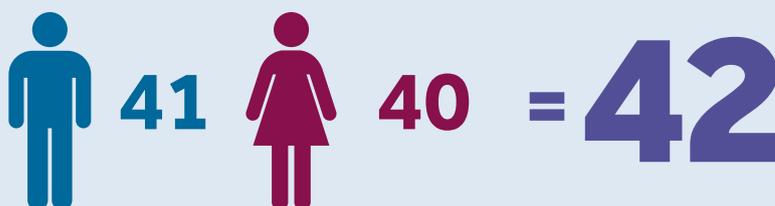
55 female
(18%)

62 unknown (20%)



Average age 2017-18

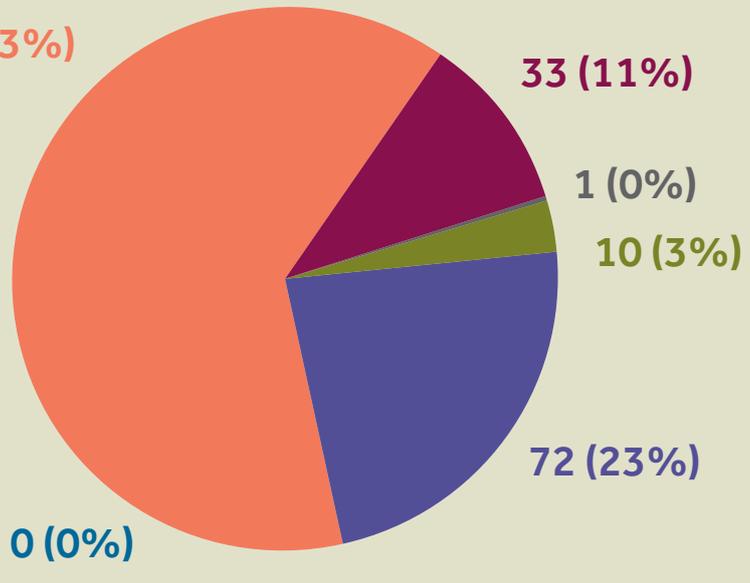
Average age of client
(‘Unknown’ ages affect averages)



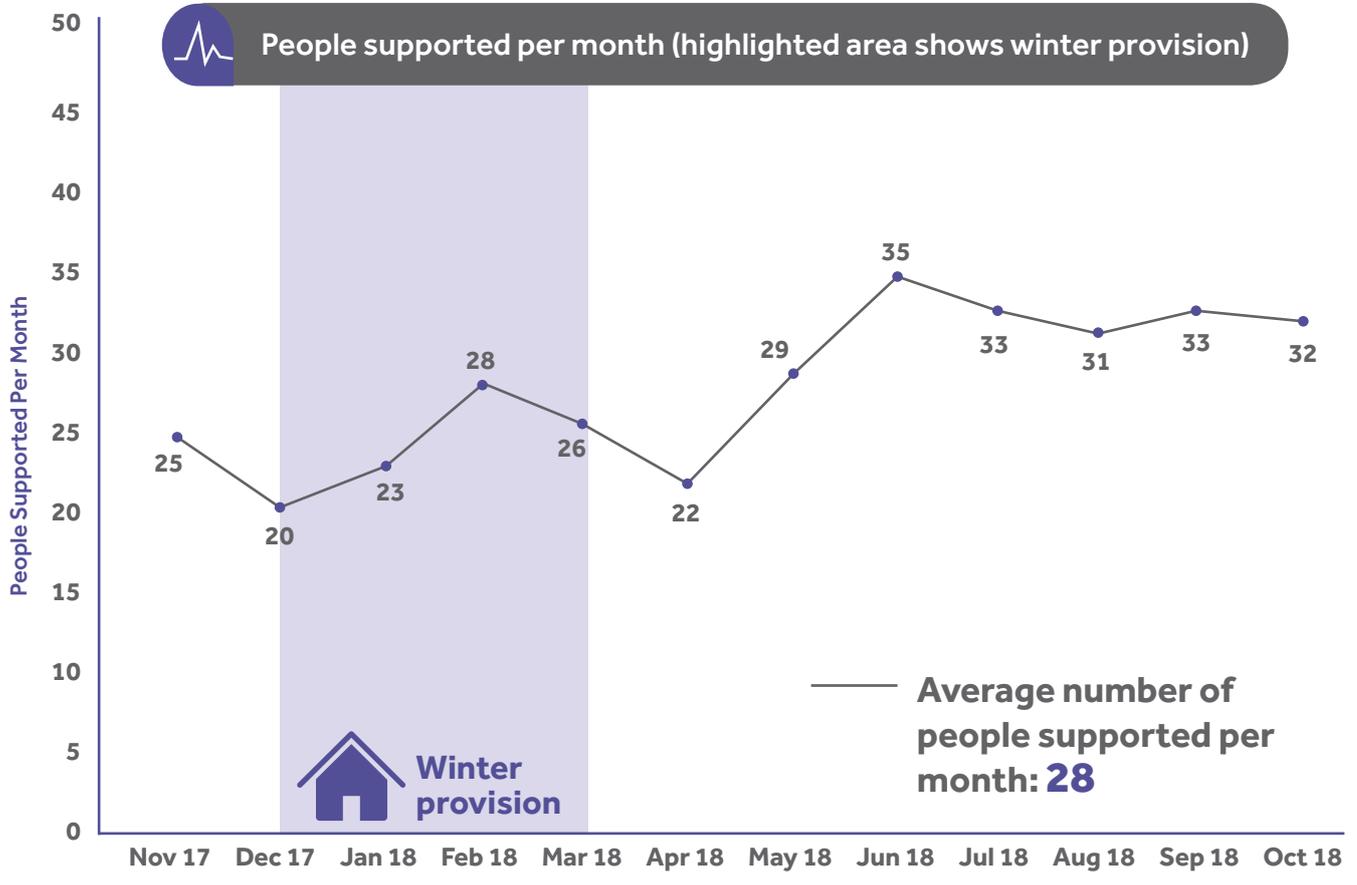
Age breakdown

- 16-17
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-50
- 51-64
- 65+

196 (63%)



People supported per month (highlighted area shows winter provision)



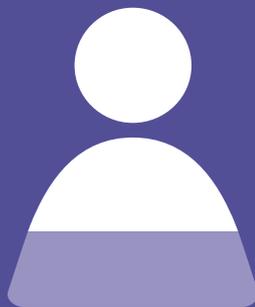
Total number of brand new contacts:
116 (37%)



Total number of people sleeping rough:
265 (85%)



From November 2017 to October 2018, the Swansea RSIT recorded contacts with **387** clients.



This is a **25%** decrease in clients compared with 2016-2017.



Contacts

4,441

This is a **47% increase** in contacts compared with 2016-17.

Ratio of clients to contacts:



Gender breakdown 2017-18

252 male
(65%)



79 female
(20%)

56 unknown (14%)



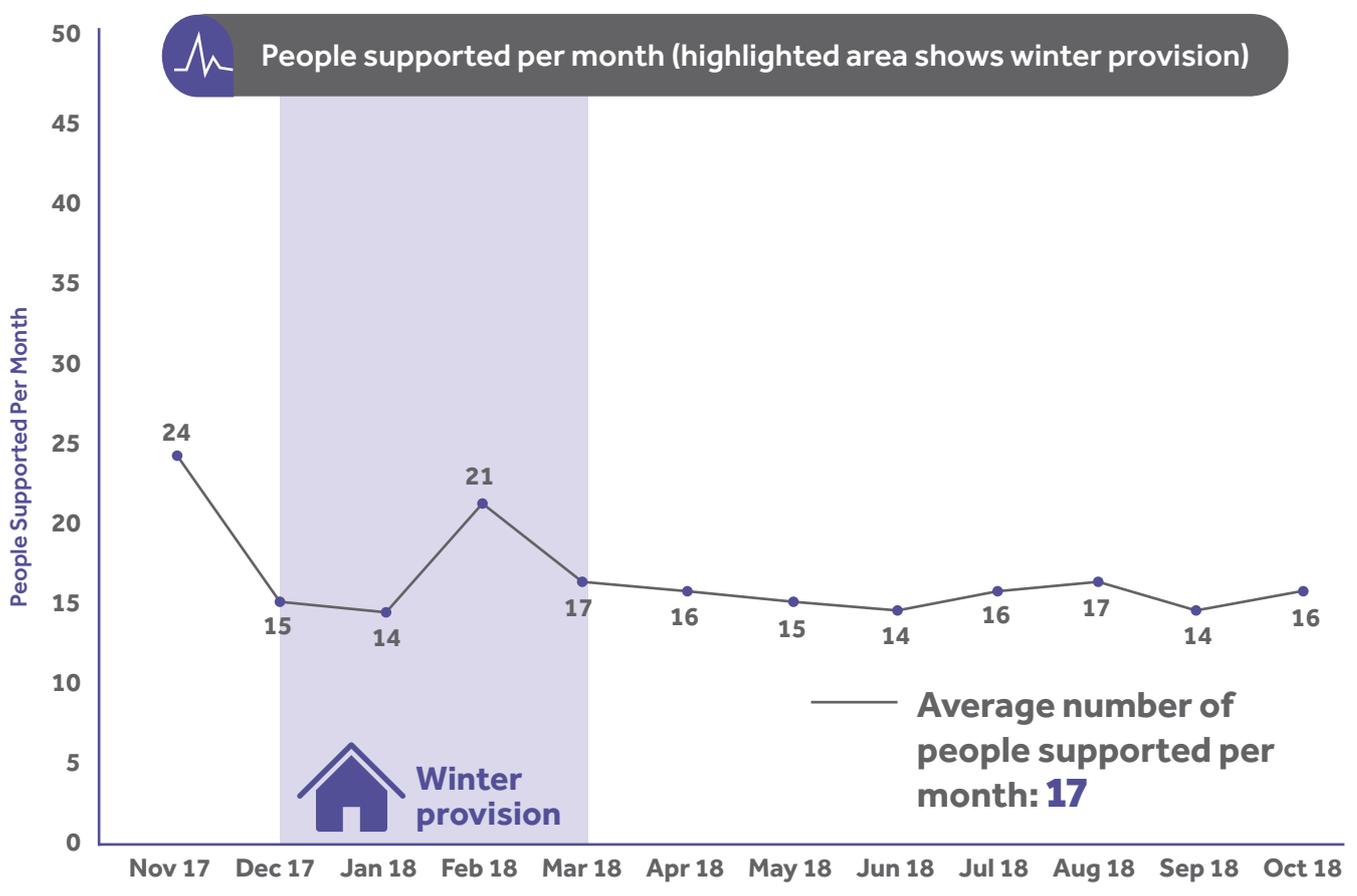
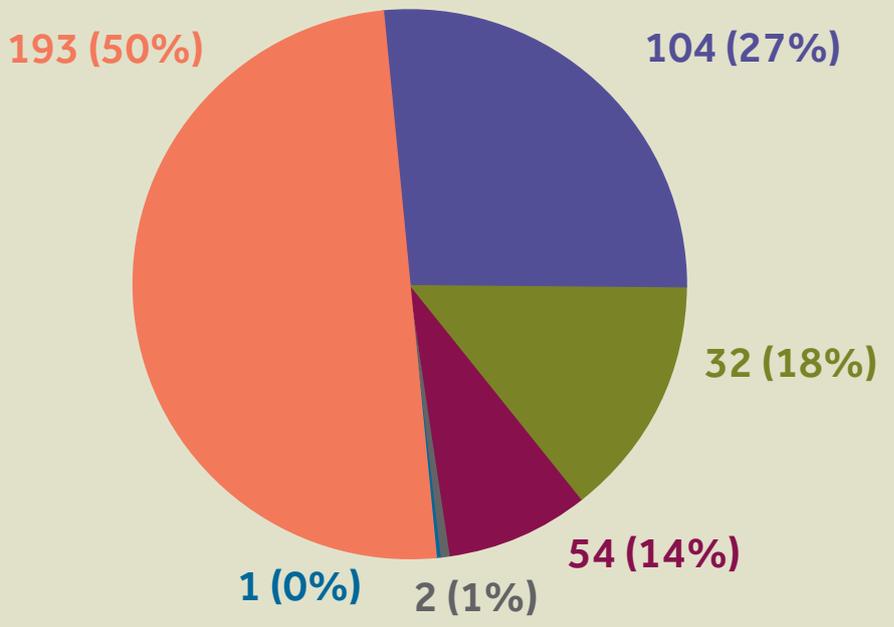
Average age 2017-18

Average age of client
(‘Unknown’ ages affect averages)



Age breakdown

- 16-17
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-50
- 51-64
- 65+



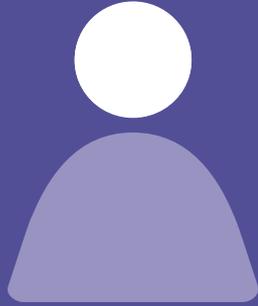
Total number of brand new contacts:
93 (24%)



Total number of people sleeping rough:
255 (66%)



From November 2017 to October 2018, the Bridgend RSIT recorded contacts with **157** clients.



This is a **64%** increase in clients compared with 2016-2017.



Contacts

4,419

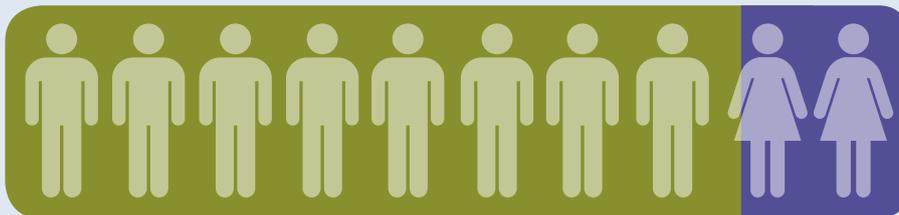
This is a **256%** increase in contacts compared with 2016-17.

Ratio of clients to contacts:



Gender breakdown 2017-18

130 male
(83%)



27 female
(17%)

0 unknown (0%)



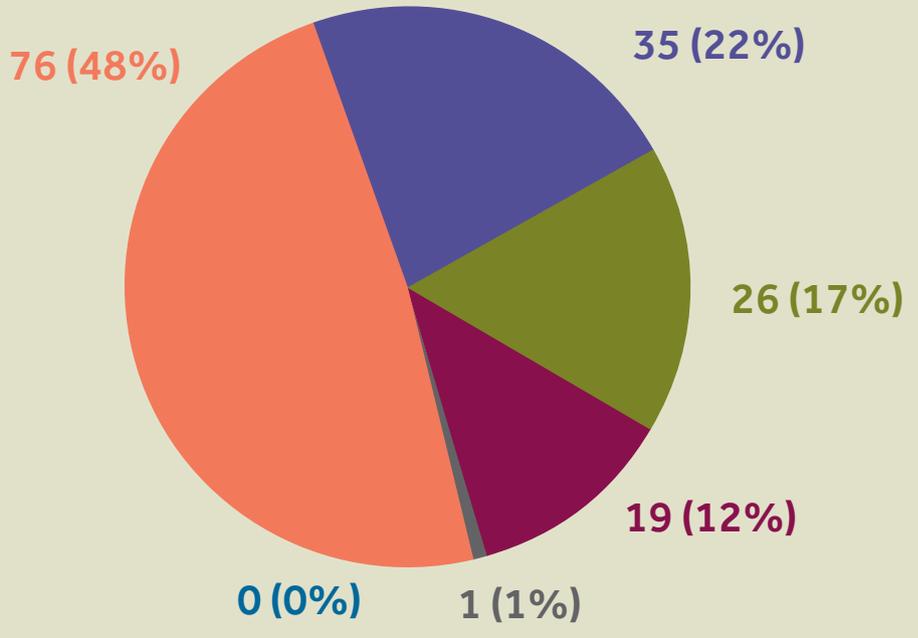
Average age 2017-18

Average age of client
(‘Unknown’ ages affect averages)

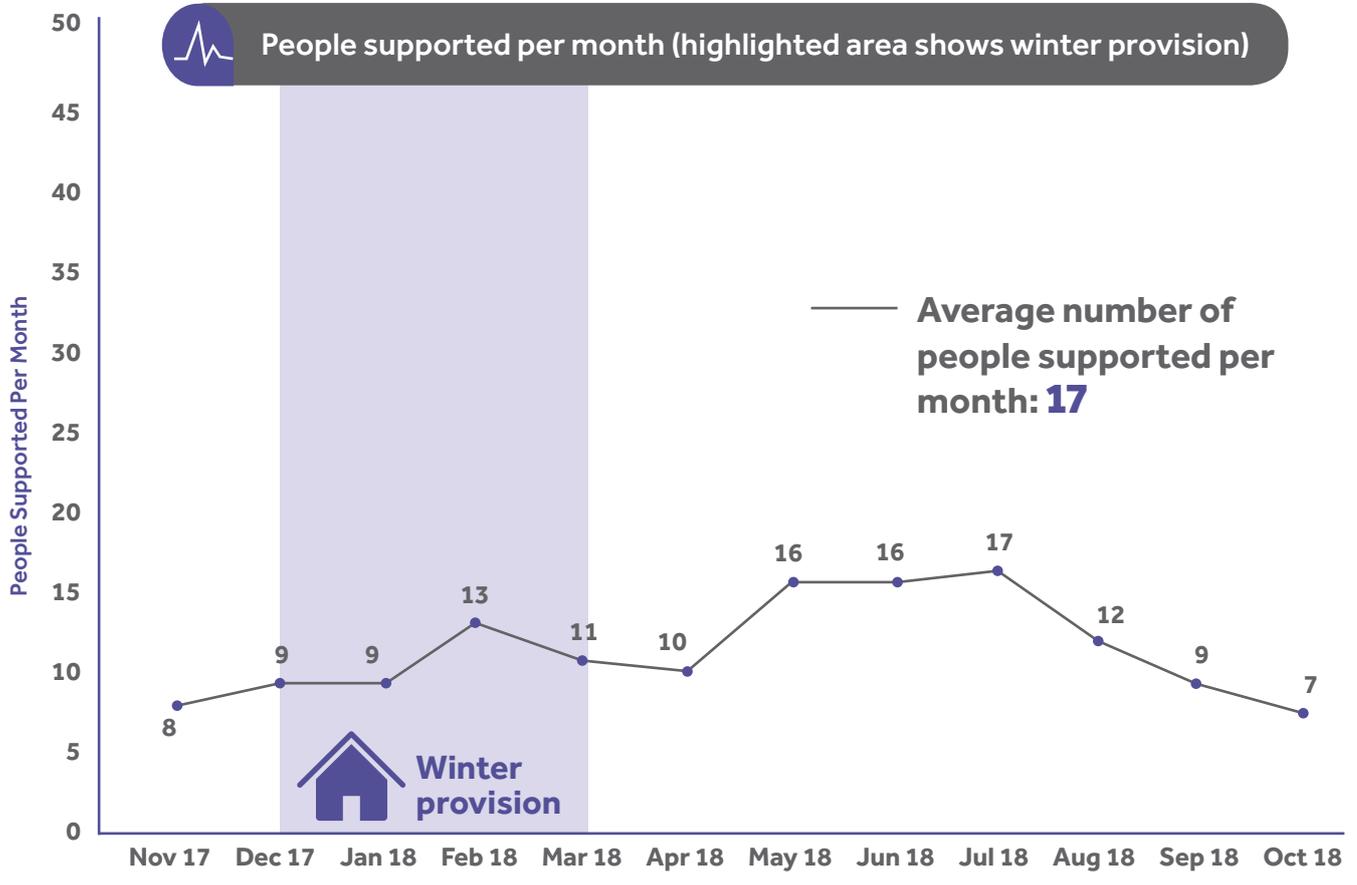


Age breakdown

- 16-17
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-50
- 51-64
- 65+



People supported per month (highlighted area shows winter provision)



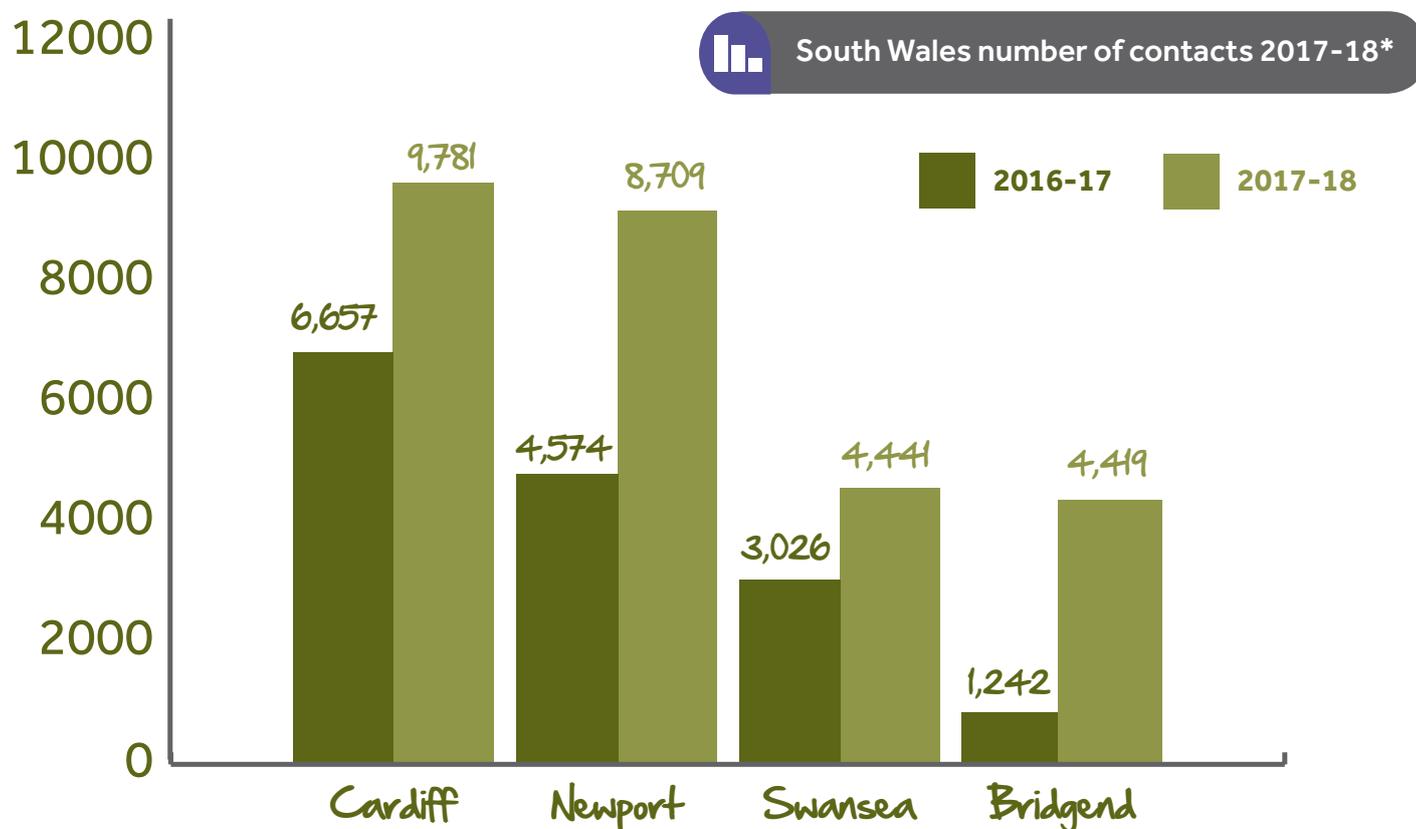
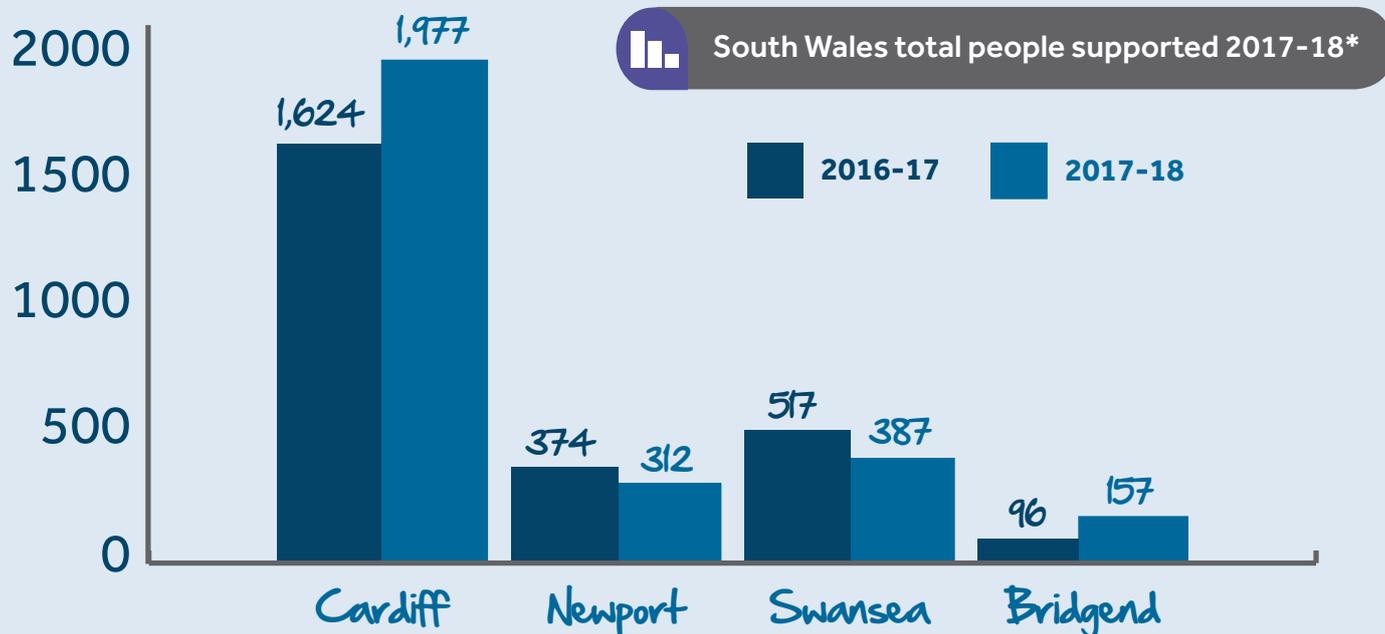
Total number of brand new contacts:
86 (55%)



Total number of people sleeping rough:
143 (91%)

South Wales Comparison 2017-18

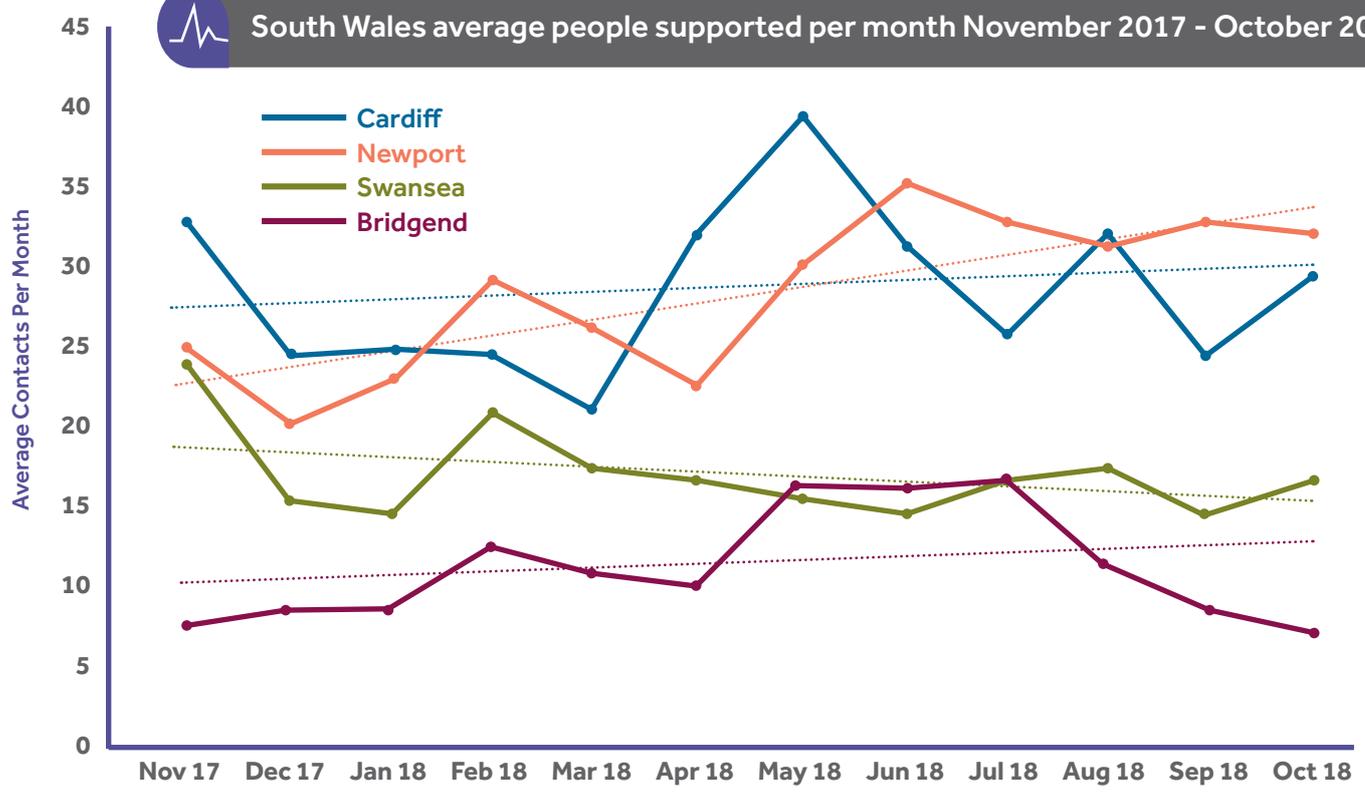
Total people supported: 2,833, a **9% increase** over the 2,611 people supported in 2016-17



*'People supported' shows the number of individual people seen by an RSIT, while the 'number of contacts' is the number of times the RSIT provided support – that is, people may have engaged more than once and each time is recorded here



South Wales average people supported per month November 2017 - October 2018



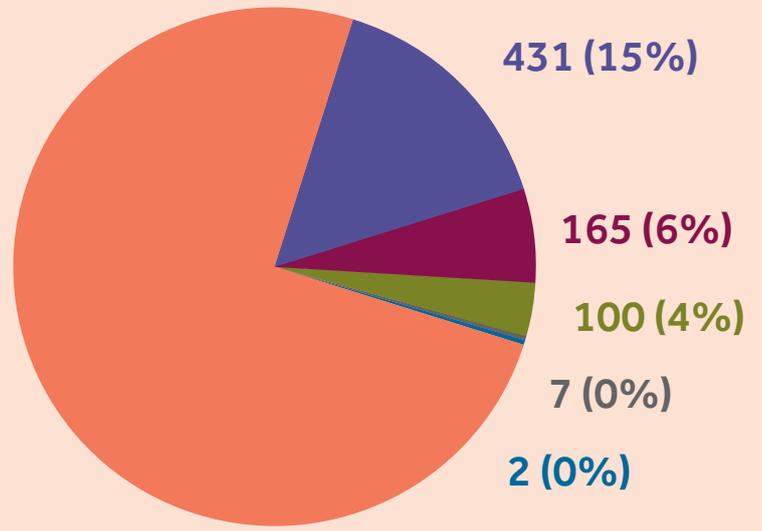
South Wales gender comparison



South Wales Age breakdown

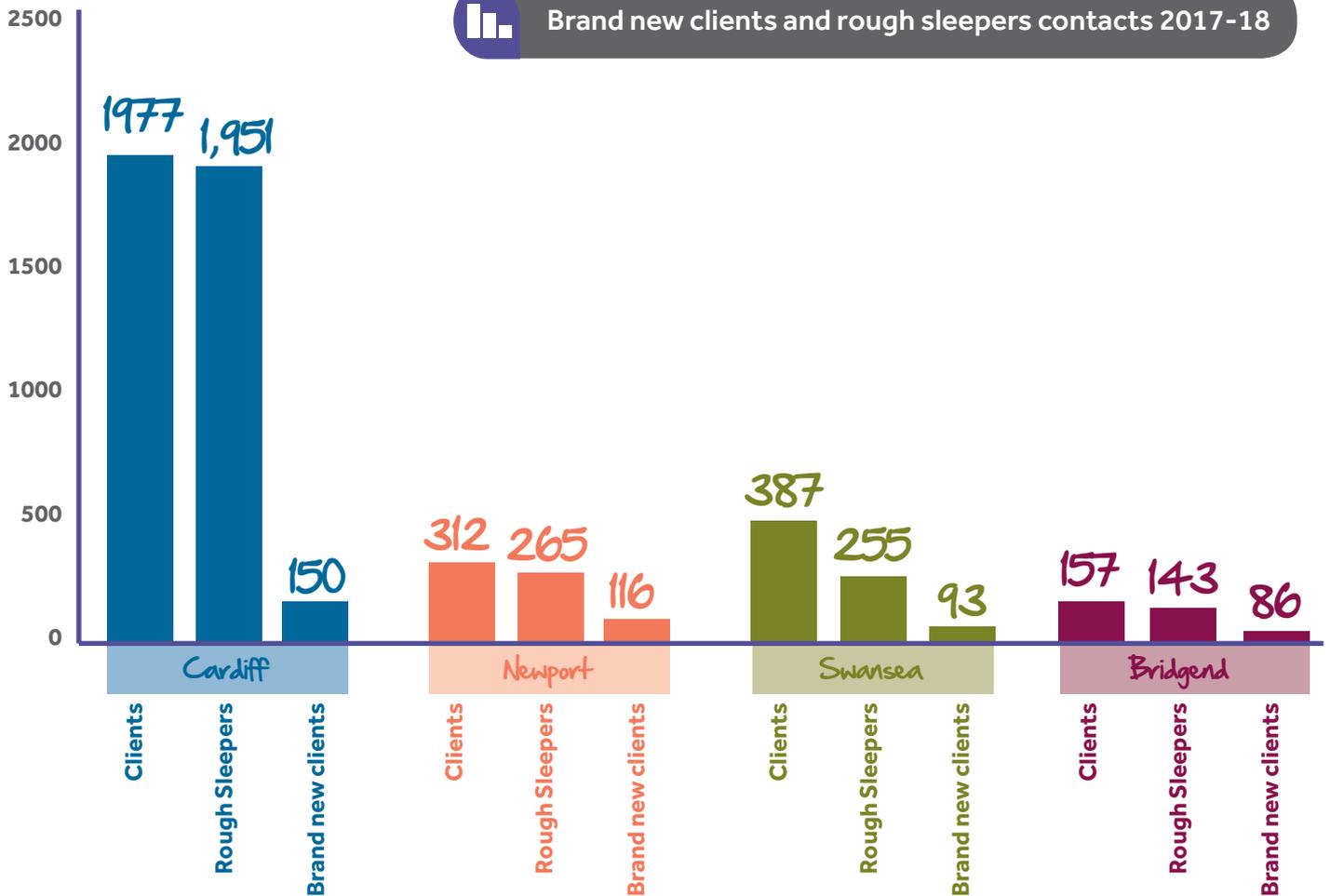
- 16-17
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-50
- 51-64
- 65+

2,128 (75%)

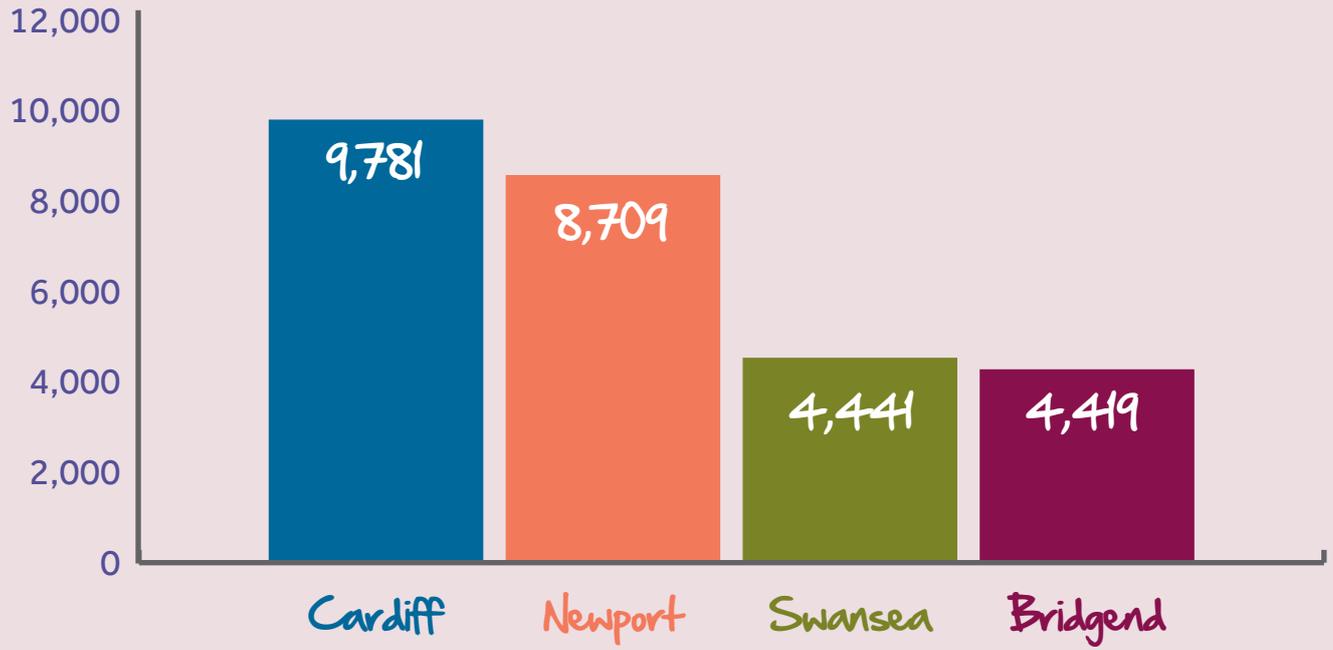


Age Bracket	2016-17	2017-18	% Change
16-17	2	2	0
18-25	148	100	-32%
26-35	585	431	-26%
36-50	1,631	2,128	+30%
51-64	222	165	-26%
65+	2	7	+250%

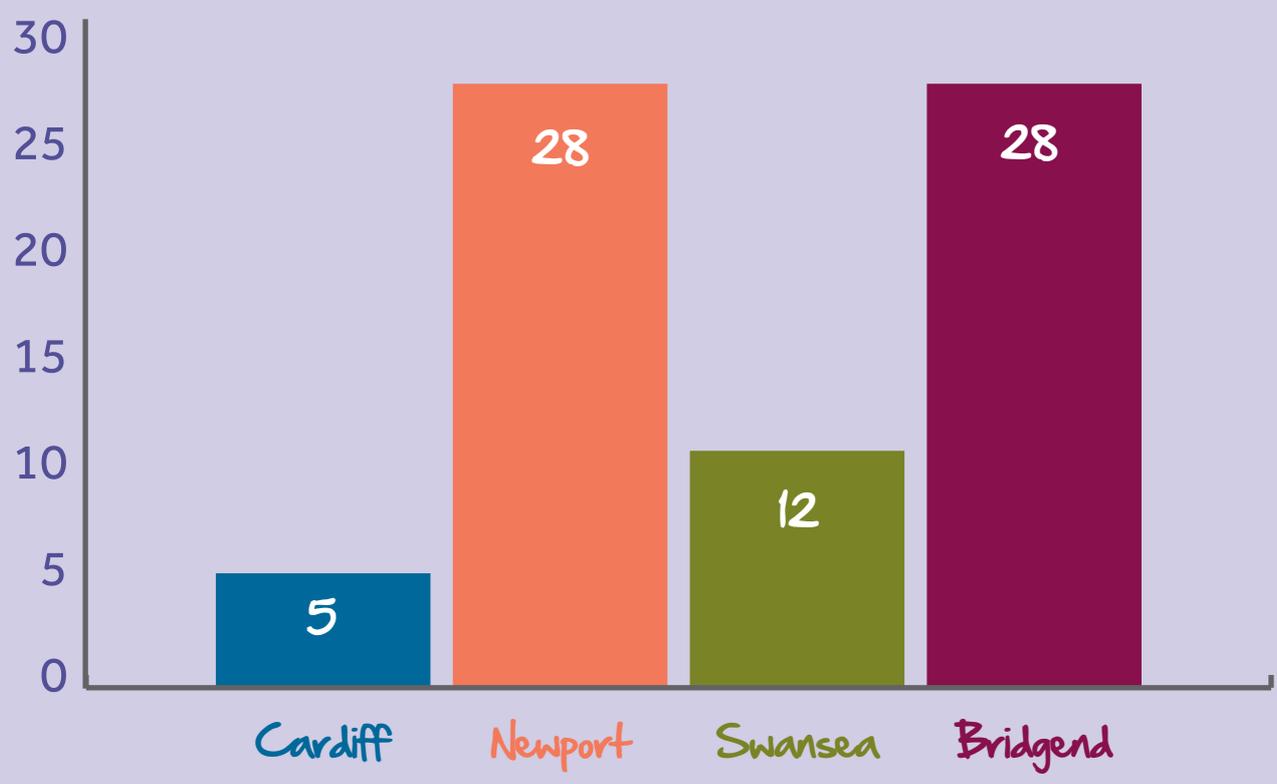
Brand new clients and rough sleepers contacts 2017-18



South Wales RSIT contacts 2017-18



South Wales client-contact ratio 2017-18



2017-18: Additional context

New to this report, this section highlights developments from the past year that have affected or might still affect rough sleeping and homelessness in Wales. Some of the issues discussed below could have directly impacted the numbers in this report, while others might have had a less direct effect – or an effect that has not been fully realised yet.

Unusual weather

Early in 2018, the UK experienced unusually heavy snowfall¹¹. In the summer, the temperatures reached record-breaking highs¹². Both extremes – at least as far as weather in Wales goes – is likely to have, at best, impacted the day-to-day lives of people living street based lifestyles. At worst, the weather could have severely impacted the health of people sleeping rough¹³. At any rate, the numbers should be looked at with these unusual conditions in mind.

Supporting People funding

Providers of homelessness and housing services received some good news in October 2018. In the past, Supporting People has been a single funding stream. Supporting People directly funds many of the services that The Wallich provides (the RSITs discussed in this report are not funded by SP funding, although the Cardiff Solutions centre and Newport drop in centre, both of which help the same people the RSITs do, are paid for by Supporting People). It has already been proven that The Wallich spends Supporting People funding effectively¹⁴. However, in 2017, Welsh Government announced they were re-examining this funding system.

Originally, the plan was to create one 'super-grant' that merged several funding streams – streams that included non-housing funds like Flying Start and Families First. The Wallich, like others in the sector, was concerned that this would remove the ring-fence around Supporting People, meaning that money that would previously have been spent dealing with homelessness might now be spent on other issues.

The Welsh housing sector's umbrella organisation, Cymorth Cymru, proposed setting up two grants rather than one – with one stream being exclusively devoted to housing and homelessness. Fortunately, Welsh Government agreed to this proposal, and for the time being at least, Supporting People is ring-fenced alongside the Homelessness Prevention Grant and the Rent Smart Wales Enforcement fund¹⁵.

We welcome Welsh Government's decision to keep housing-related funding separate and protected for the time being. That said, rough sleeping represents the most dangerous and harmful form of homelessness; because it is still rising, overall, it is important that policymakers and commissioners ensure funding that pays for services aimed at tackling rough sleeping are prioritised and remain protected for the foreseeable future. A long-term commitment like this would enable organisations like The Wallich to plan and deliver services in the most effective and sustainable way.

¹¹Express, "UK snow forecast: Temperatures set to plummet – Polar weekend ahead", accessed January 28, 2019, www.express.co.uk/news/weather/900791/UK-BBC-weather-snow-report-latest-forecast-update-weekend-cold-video

¹²The Guardian, "Summer 2018 was UK's joint hottest on record, Met Office says", accessed January 28, 2019, www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/03/summer-2018-uk-joint-hottest-on-record-met-office-says

¹³BBC News, "Sunburn and dehydration: Homeless in the heatwave", accessed January 28, 2019, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-44786498

¹⁴The Wallich, "Support that Saves", accessed November 26, 2018, https://thewallich.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Support_that_Saves.pdf

¹⁵Cymorth Cymru, "Cymorth and CHC welcome Welsh Government decision to safeguard homelessness and housing support funding", accessed January 28, 2019, www.cymorthcymru.org.uk/en/news-blog/news/cymorth-and-chc-welcome-welsh-government-decision-safeguard-homelessness-and-housing-support-funding

Housing First: Welsh Government policy

In February 2018, Welsh Government announced its official endorsement of Housing First as policy to help tackle homelessness among entrenched homeless people with complex mental health conditions¹⁶. The Wallich welcomed this, having delivered Housing First in Anglesey for more than four years.

Housing First is built around the idea of providing clients with choice and control when it comes to their support, as well as providing them with accommodation with no conditions or requirements – just the encouragement to engage with the help they need¹⁷.

The approach has been proven to work among its target client group, and while there remain concerns and questions to be answered¹⁸, The Wallich supports Welsh Government's recognition of the worldwide successes of Housing First.

Psychologically Informed Environments at The Wallich

Building on work done in 2016-17, The Wallich continued its rollout of the PIE (Psychologically Informed Environments) approach across the organisation. The PIE approach involves working therapeutically, with an awareness of a client's psychological context¹⁹. One of The Wallich's multi-property projects operates according to PIE. What's more, all staff are being trained in the principles of PIE, and The Wallich is investing considerable expense into hiring therapists and revamping the physical environments at its projects across Wales.

This work will continue for some time; although in many instances adopting the PIE approach is simply 'common sense', and staff at The Wallich would be working this way already, there is still a lot to be done. The Wallich is developing an internal 'PIE Portal' to share good practice, and will publish a series of blog posts to update external audiences as to the progress of PIE at the organisation.

Street Homelessness Information Network (SHIN)

The Wallich continues to host the Street Homelessness Information Network project; the idea behind this initiative is to model a data system for people on the streets similar to London's CHAIN system. Local authorities and organisations providing support across Wales will use this same system to record and retrieve information about people sleeping rough; as this report has already stated, the more data is available about people in this vulnerable situation, the better we can develop solutions.

Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee consultation

Earlier this year, the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee in the National Assembly for Wales released the Life on the Streets report²⁰. This report was the result of a consultation the Committee facilitated, listening to the views of a wide range of stakeholders (including staff from The Wallich) about the issue of rough sleeping in Wales. Its recommendations were insightful and far-reaching, and The Wallich emphasises some of them later in this report.

¹⁶Welsh Government, "Action to tackle homelessness", accessed January 28, 2019,

<https://gov.wales/newsroom/housing-and-regeneration/2018/180206-action-to-tackle-homelessness/?lang=en>

¹⁷Housing First England, "About Housing First", accessed January 28, 2019, <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/about-housing-first>

¹⁸Welsh Housing Quarterly, "Hope for Housing First", accessed January 28, 2019,

<https://www.whq.org.uk/the-magazine/issue/112/hope-housing-first/>

¹⁹Homeless Link, "Why PIE? The rationale for psychologically informed environments", accessed January 28, 2019,

<https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2017/feb/08/why-pie-rationale-for-psychologically-informed-environments>

²⁰National Assembly for Wales, "Life on the streets: preventing and tackling rough sleeping in Wales", accessed January 28, 2019, www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11517/cr-ld11517-e.pdf

Section Four: Analysis, recommendations and conclusion

Analysis

This is the second Street Based Lifestyle Monitor to cover four areas in which Rough Sleeper Intervention Teams (RSIT) operate; although it covers the subsequent year, it spans the same twelve-month period. As such, some tentative comparisons can be made.

Readers should still bear in mind that there are difficulties associated with obtaining reliable data when it comes to people experiencing homelessness or vulnerable housing situations. Further investigation into specific aspects of the statistics presented here would be necessary to draw firm conclusions.

By examining the statistics and graphs in the previous section, however, we can identify the following themes, as well as make some comparisons to the previous year:

- The total number of people supported by The Wallich RSITs has risen from 2,611 to 2,833, an increase of 9%
- The total number of contacts (where individual people can be recorded several times, once for each time they engage with an RSIT) has risen by an average of 62%
- In 2016-17, every RSIT supported more people than it had the previous year; this is not the case for 2017-18. More people were supported in Cardiff and Bridgend, but fewer were supported in Newport and Swansea. In Cardiff, the increase is 22%; for Bridgend, the increase is 64%. The decrease in Newport is 17%, and the decrease in Swansea is 25%. The average change, therefore, is an increase of 11%
- All RSITs, however, have seen an increase in the number of contacts
- It should be noted that 'winter provision' can affect the number of people engaged with by RSITs. These periods are marked on the twelve-month line graphs for each team; during winter months, churches make spaces available for people to sleep. In very cold conditions, some organisations make additional bedspaces available (in Cardiff, for example, the Huggard Centre offers additional 'floorspace' during winter months). Because of this, numbers of RSIT contacts often decrease disproportionately, and are lower than they would be otherwise, although this varies by area. Anecdotally, our members of staff have long reported that numbers of people sleeping rough tend to be higher during summer, when the weather is warmer. Given the unusual weather patterns this year – both hot and cold – it is possible that the numbers have been distorted more than usual
- Individuals living street based lifestyles are more likely to be male, with males accounting for between 39% and 83% of team contacts; readers should bear in mind gender is not always known or recorded (people covered up and sleeping are not woken), but anecdotal evidence bears out a clear majority of males – for example, even though male clients made up only 39% of those engaged with in Cardiff, females numbered just 8%. This does not rule out the possibility that a larger-than-expected number of the 'unknown' genders were female, but this seems unlikely, given the 58% male and 11% female split from the previous year
- The average age of the individuals that make contact with the different RSITs ranges from 38 to 45, which is a larger age bracket than last year, when it was 40 to 42. The average age across all RSITs, rounding to the nearest whole number, is 42
- The age group most represented in RSIT contacts is still the 36-50 bracket (although it is also the largest bracket in terms of age span)
- The age group least represented remains the 16-17 bracket.

The next section deals with data that, in the previous report, was not available for the full year. As such, we can't make a fair comparison between the data below and the equivalent data in the SBL Monitor covering 2016-17.

- Most individuals living street based lifestyles are sleeping rough when they engage with The Wallich's RSITs; they comprise from 66% (in Swansea) to 99% (in Cardiff) of the total engagements, with an average of 85%
- The number of brand new individuals engaging with an RSIT (people who have never engaged with a Wallich RSIT service before) varies more, ranging from 8% to 55% for different teams, which might suggest entrenched rough sleeping is an underlying factor in certain areas, although this would require further investigation. The average percentage across the four South Wales RSITs is 31%
- The client-contact ratios give some idea of how many times individuals tend to be seen by an RSIT over the given period. Ratios range from 5 to 28, with an average of 18. These numbers demonstrate some interesting possibilities: although Cardiff has the highest number of clients, it has the lowest client-contact ratio. In some ways, this is understandable – a bigger city will have a bigger group of people for the RSIT to engage with; a group which is likely to move around more. Bridgend has the joint-highest client-contact ratio, along with Newport, at 28. In these areas, there might exist a small group of individuals with which the RSIT repeatedly engages. Again, our anecdotal evidence suggests this is the case. It is interesting that Newport, which is considerably bigger than Bridgend, has the same ratio, making it a large area where people also tend to be seen a lot – a kind of hybrid of Bridgend and Cardiff. More research is needed to investigate further.

Discussing these results with members of the RSIT teams, we can make some further conclusions:

- In Swansea, although the number of individual people has dropped, the number of contacts has risen by 47%. The number of contacts has, in fact, risen across South Wales, suggesting there is more entrenched homelessness, even in places where the number of individual people supported has dropped.
- The decreases in the number of individuals in Newport and Swansea, coupled with the increase in Cardiff, might suggest movement of people from the smaller cities to the capital.
- Large increases in Bridgend could be explained by the opening of new floor space facility – people can stay there for an unlimited amount of time with no return restrictions; this facility relieves the need to rough sleep and sofa surf, but it also appears to remove the pressure and requirement to work with services to move on to more permanent accommodation.
- Changes to the welfare system are also having an impact on the numbers in Bridgend, as people need to change their budgeting, and potentially wait for benefit payments. The lack of affordable housing is also cited by the RSIT team staff – this applies to the whole of Wales and, indeed, the rest of the UK. It is likely that the introduction of Universal Credit is having an effect across the different areas too.
- Cardiff staff highlight the lack of affordable housing, as well as the fact that the city is a capital, with a high number of support services – these factors can attract people from different areas and result in numbers increasing.
- In Cardiff, more charitable organisations are giving out tents, and it has become more common for service users to pitch up tents in the city centre rather than somewhere out-of-the-way. Additionally, differences in the law mean that tents in city centres can only be removed in certain circumstances, while tents in parks, for example, can be removed more easily. Because of their presence in the city centre, people living in tents are more likely to access the RSIT service. The tents, however, are acting as a barrier to more permanent accommodation because people stay in them for long periods rather than accessing the relevant services.
- Newport staff mention the success they've had with transitional funding, which enables them to offer support finding accommodation, and support sustaining the tenancy for up to six months. This support is offered to a small cohort and has been quite successful – of eight people housed, five are still in accommodation. This might account for the decrease in individuals seen by the Newport RSIT – the increase in actual contacts might then point to increased entrenched street-based living, as discussed more generally.

- Causes of the changes to the age ranges are unclear. The large percentage increase in the oldest age bracket comes from changes in very small numbers. This, combined with the increase in the 36-50 bracket, might simply come from entrenched rough sleepers aging – this might explain the drop in the lower age brackets, though it doesn't explain the drop in the 51-64 bracket – again, the rise in numbers of the oldest age bracket could in part come from entrenched rough sleepers 'aging out of' the bracket below.
- Comments from Cardiff RSIT staff bear this out – increased barriers to long-term accommodation mean people are spending a longer time on the streets and, simply, grow older. Other than that, however, age ranges in Cardiff seem to be similar to previous years.
- In Newport, staff point out the fact that they tend to see a lot of 40-50 year-olds.
- The increase in the number of people aged 65 and over on the streets does warrant an examination of the particular issues associated with being elderly and living a street based lifestyle.

Recommendations and conclusion

As the analysis section has made clear, one must be cautious when drawing conclusions when it comes to data linked to homelessness, rough sleeping, and street based lifestyles. Sometimes, people deliberately try and hide for their own safety, or are wary of engaging with services, for a variety of reasons. The nature of these lifestyles means that people move around. Our Rough Sleeper Intervention Teams do their best to work within this context, but this should be noted.

However, we think the numbers here provide a useful 'snapshot' of street based lifestyles in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Bridgend. The most striking fact is that the number of contacts our RSITs make, overall, is rising. This has been a recurring theme throughout our quarterly reports and monthly updates, but by looking at a year's worth of data, we have a clearer picture of the situation.

Other aspects of street based lifestyles remain consistent with other work we have done – the prevalence of men in our contacts, as well as the age group consisting of 36-50-year-olds. These aspects merit further investigation, so a better idea of cause and consequence can be formulated, with a view to reaching solutions. The statistics above align with the qualitative experiences of our frontline staff, whether they work in The Wallich's RSITs, hostels, floating support services, or supported accommodation.

This report makes some basic recommendations for stakeholders – the first time a Wallich report of this type has done so. Most of the recommendations are based on evidence present here in the research, but also comes from other experiences The Wallich has had over the past twelve months or longer.

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Recommendation 1

Welsh Government and other organisations in Wales to continue to promote Housing First as an effective solution for entrenched homelessness, and should develop Housing First initiatives. Supported housing is a vital part of today's homelessness provision in Wales; we recommend a wider rollout of Housing First, which has a robust evidence base, to ensure Wales can provide a range of effective services for different clients

Recommendation 2

Wales needs a much bigger push when it comes to constructing more affordable housing

Recommendation 3

Different agencies (housing, health, criminal justice, and so on) need to work together more effectively, and focus on trauma-informed approaches to providing support

Recommendation 4

Welsh Government should ensure that funding aimed at rough sleeping in Wales is protected in the same way Supporting People funding is protected now

Recommendation 5

Enhanced Harm Reduction Centres (where people can use drugs in medically supervised conditions) would be an effective way to reduce dangerous litter on the streets, encourage safer injection practice, and provide users with clear support options to reduce drug use

Recommendation 6

As the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's report recommended, the abolition of the 'priority need' system in Wales, if it were replaced by one in which everyone living a street based lifestyle gets the support they need when they need it, could improve the rough sleeping situation immeasurably

Recommendation 7

More mobile service provision is needed across Wales – particularly in hard-to-reach or rural areas, as well as those with reduced access to services; additionally, mobile support can be provided during out-of-hours periods. The Wallich's Welfare Vehicle is an example of this kind of approach.

What can you do?

Readers might be wondering what they should do if they see someone sleeping rough or otherwise appearing to be engaged in a street based lifestyle. Whether to provide money, food, or drink comes down to personal choice, and it is worth remembering that, sometimes, just spending some time talking can mean a lot to someone in a vulnerable situation. It is also worth making yourself aware of the services available in your area, so you can pass this useful information on to somebody on the streets you might stop and speak to.

In terms of more concerted action, readers can contact 'StreetLink', an organisation that partners with The Wallich in Wales. By using StreetLink, members of the public can alert a local authority to the location of an individual, so the local authority can follow up - either using its own resources or working in concert with organisations like The Wallich. StreetLink can be accessed via its website²¹, a downloadable smartphone app, or called on 0300 500 0914.

²¹StreetLink, "Welcome to StreetLink", January 28, 2019, <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/>

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