

Our Strategy to tackle homelessness in Bridgend County Borough

2018 - 2022

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1.0 Introduction

Homelessness can have a major impact on a person's and / or their family's life. It can be detrimental to a person's health, employment or education and training opportunities.

There are often misconceptions about homelessness. It is not always about rough sleeping and not just about the availability of accommodation. Statutory homelessness includes people living in unsuitable or temporary accommodation.

Additionally, there are often complex reasons for people becoming and remaining homeless. Many people are unable to sustain accommodation because of issues such as mental illness or substance misuse issues. Solutions therefore need to be varied and tailored to individual needs.

Homelessness also has an adverse impact on the economy and increases pressure on public services, including, health, police, education and social services. This is why it is imperative that statutory and non-statutory services, work together to make tackling homelessness a priority.

Housing and support services need to be easily accessible, readily available and designed around and responsive to the needs of the people who use them. The Local Authority needs to work in partnership with citizens to prevent homelessness, empowering people to take steps to resolve their housing issues, to have more choice, make their own decisions and retain control of their lives.

Therefore, this document sets out Bridgend County Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy for 2018-2022. The Strategy looks at the picture of homelessness in the county borough, where Bridgend County Borough Council are now, what Bridgend County Borough Council do well and ultimately a vision for where Bridgend County Borough Council wants to be. The Strategy also sets key aims and subsequent objectives to achieve the vision.



Councillor Dhanisha Patel
Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations

1.1 Executive Summary

The Local Authority has embraced the new duties under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and has re-configured its staffing structure, processes and policies to take on the preventative and relief duties to reduce homelessness.

The Authority has responded to the increased and changed needs of its residents who were and are facing homelessness. In collaboration with local third sector organisations, the Authority utilised Supporting People and Homeless Prevention grant funding to commission key projects for people in need. This includes additional units of temporary accommodation and increased options for people who require housing related support. Furthermore, the Authority established direct access floor space as a year round option for street homeless people, and a supplemental pilot project which offers support during specific parts of the day.

Despite this proactive response, challenges remain. Homelessness presentations are increasing, this is due to a number of factors, not least the changes to the welfare benefits system; and presentations from people with increasingly complex needs, including mental ill-health, substance misuse, and poverty of finance and opportunity. Responding to these challenges at a time of financial constraint presents a further dilemma.

In addition, there will be forthcoming extensions to duties the Local Authority owe to some people who are found to have made themselves 'intentionally homeless' and the possibility of changes to the 'priority need' categories for homeless people. This could lead to an increased demand on already limited resources, in particular temporary accommodation.

Homelessness and its impacts are wide reaching. No single organisation has the ability to overcome the challenges and as such it is important that statutory and non-statutory functions work together to tackle this cross cutting issue.

The Local Authority is determined to overcome these challenges and our vision is:

“To work collaboratively on a corporate basis with external partners, and service users, in a responsive, creative and timely manner to prevent and relieve homelessness throughout the county borough, ensuring people can access suitable accommodation, with the support required to meet their needs”

The following have been identified as strategic aims that recognise homelessness is not just a housing issue:

- Improve collaboration between external organisations
- Improve collaboration between the statutory functions within the Local Authority.
- Improve working arrangements between the Local Authority and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to facilitate co-operation in line with Section 95 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.
- Improve how people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness access services.
- Improve the accessibility and availability of support and accommodation options for all service users.

2.0 Where are Bridgend County Borough Council now?

2.1 Understanding Homelessness in Bridgend

In 2017-18:

- 1020 households presented to the Local Authority because they were homeless or threatened with homelessness. This is projected to increase by 28% by the end of 2018/19.
- 68% of households were single people. This is a slight increase from 2016/17 where it was 66% but similar to 2015/16 where it was 69%.
- 10% of households were people aged 55 or over. This is an increase from 2016/17 where it was 6% and from 2015/16 where it was 7%. It is projected that the percentage will remain consistent by the end of 2018/19 at 10%
- Since implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act, the number of homelessness presentations for people aged 55 or over has significantly increased from 65 in 2015/16 to a projected 134 by the end of 2018-19.
- 59% of presentations were from people aged under 34 and under. This is a slight reduction from 2016/17 where it was 60% and 2015/16 where it was 61%.
- 6% of presentations were from people aged 16 or 17 years old. This is consistent with 2016/17 where it was 5% and 2015/16 where it was 7%. It is projected that the percentage will remain consistent by the end of 2018/19 at 6%.
- Since implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act, the number of homelessness presentations for people aged 16 or 17 has increased from 57 in 2015/16 to a projected 80 by the end of 2018-19.
- The greatest reason for homelessness was “loss of rented or tied accommodation” (19%) followed by “parent no longer able or willing to accommodate” (13%) and “other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate” (13%).
- The Local Authority successfully prevented 69% of households threatened with homelessness from actually becoming homeless during this period .
- Private rented housing (38%) and social rented housing (39%) were the most used methods for preventing homelessness.
- Private rented housing (38%) and social rented housing (27%) were also the most used methods for relieving homelessness for households who were actually homeless. However, supported accommodation is also increasingly being used (24%).
- Private rented housing (20%) and social rented housing (36%) were again the most commonly used methods for securing accommodation for those whom the Council

had a 'final' duty to house, where it had not been possible to prevent or relieve the homelessness.

- 41% of people for whom the Council had a 'final' duty to house had a negative outcome, such as becoming intentionally homeless from suitable interim accommodation (for example being evicted for rent arrears or breaching accommodation rules) or refusing a suitable offer of accommodation.
- 307 households were helped by being placed into temporary accommodation. This was a 6% increase on 2016/17 and an 8% increase on 2015/16. Local Authority owned hostel accommodation was the most commonly used form of temporary accommodation, where 67% of households were placed.
- 49% of nominations from the Common Housing Register resulted in a successful allocation of accommodation. 28% of nominations were refused by the Registered Social Landlord and 23% were refused by the applicant.

As at November 2018:

- 76 households are accommodated in temporary accommodation.
- 1018 households are registered on the Bridgend Common Housing Register.
- 89 households are threatened with homelessness and being helped to prevent their homelessness.
- 115 households are homeless and being helped to relieve their homelessness.
- 79 households are homeless and owed a final duty by the Local Authority to find them accommodation.
- During the annual rough sleeper count undertaken between the hours of 10pm on 8th November and 5am on 9th November 2018 there were 10 emergency bed spaces available. 5 people accessed the emergency provision, whilst 5 people did not, instead they chose to sleep rough. This is consistent with previous years.

2.2 Key messages from our Homelessness Review

A comprehensive statutory review was undertaken for Bridgend County Borough Council between July and October 2018, in line with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 where local authorities have a duty to undertake a Homelessness Review and prepare a Homelessness Strategy. The key messages from the review are:

- **Homeless presentations are increasing.** There has been an 18% increase in presentations between 2015/16 and 2017/18. It is projected that there will be a further 28% increase in presentations by the end of 2018/19. Presentations from people aged 55 or over and aged 16-17 have seen a notable increase.
- **The corporate approach, involving Education, Social Services and Housing needs to be strengthened.** This is to ensure that opportunities to prevent or relieve homelessness are not being lost.
- **Research undertaken by a number of reputable organisations confirms the cost of not addressing homelessness has a negative financial impact across the wider public sector.** This includes social services, health, the criminal justice system, and education.
- **Homelessness significantly affects health and wellbeing** and is evidenced by the multiple and complex needs of many people presenting as homeless. As well as addressing housing needs, homeless services can prevent deterioration of physical and mental well-being.
- **Prevention and relief of homelessness should be explicit within all statutory corporate plans, including Health and Probation.** This needs to be more than a commitment. These plans should include detail on prevention and relief pathways for key groups at risk e.g. young people in care, people with mental health and/or substance misuse challenges.
- **'Front door' access to housing advice must be improved.** A redesign and alternative methods of triage could reduce the amount of times people have to share their personal stories, before they can access the service they require. It could also increase staff capacity, allowing for more timely interventions and reducing unnecessary and more costly escalation of issues.
- **Better use of technology and digitalisation could improve service provision.** Service users could access services and more information in a more timely and efficient manner, via a good quality website and the telephone.
- **Access to support services must be improved and diverse.** People in support services have positive experiences, but people are not necessarily aware of the support available and services are not always easily accessible. A variety of inclusive support providers and services should be available, that are accessible and dovetail one another, especially for people with mental health and/or substance misuse issues.

- **A wider variety of accommodation options should be explored.** This is particularly relevant for people with high and complex support needs and those who are not suitable for, or do not engage with traditional accommodation / support methods.
- **RSLs are keen to build on existing relationships with the Local Authority.** Section 95 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 introduced a duty for RSLs to co-operate, with the aim of preventing and relieving homelessness. There are some disparities in practices which require more investigation. Better and timelier information will assist with allocations and there is a need for a resettlement pathway for people with a history of arson or sexual offences.
- **Key stakeholders welcome joint strategic planning opportunities with the Local Authority.** More proactive relationships will improve co-ordination and planning of services across the wider sector. Increased opportunities for partners to meet, will allow a forum for highlighting challenges and opportunities.
- **Co-produce pathways with partners and service users.** All-inclusive, coherent pathway planning can deliver required outcomes, ensuring there is clarity around roles and responsibilities.

3.0 What do Bridgend County Borough Council do well?

The Local Authority has made significant progress in adapting to and implementing the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

3.1 The Housing Solutions Team

Since the implementation of the Housing Wales Act (2014) in April 2015 the Team have:

- Successfully prevented 67% of households threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless (819 households)
- Successfully relieved the homelessness of 43% of households who were actually homeless (856 households)
- Assisted 427 households to remain in their current accommodation or find alternative accommodation, utilising a Spend to Save Scheme
- Responded to homelessness by making 1380 placements into temporary accommodation
- Successfully housed 523 households threatened with or actually homeless via the Common Housing Register

The Local Authority's Housing Solutions Team work well in partnership with the Customer Contact Centre to deliver a front line information and advice service. The Contact Centre deal with initial housing queries and makes an appointment with the Housing Solutions Team when more specialist advice is needed. This process helps to prioritise cases so that the Housing Solutions Team have greater capacity to deal with more urgent cases, such as people presenting as homeless.

The Housing Solutions Team undertake a comprehensive housing and support assessment of applicants and are responsible for processing and managing all homelessness applications, including discharging the Authority's duties under the Act. Where a homelessness presentation is received from a 16 or 17 year old a joint assessment is undertaken alongside Social Services.

Where temporary accommodation is required, the Housing Solutions Team aims to accommodate households in accommodation that best meets their needs. The Local Authority has commissioned a variety of temporary accommodation options including:

- Family and young person's hostel
- Single person's hostel
- Self-contained and shared single person accommodation
- Leased private rented accommodation for families and single persons
- Refuge for women fleeing domestic abuse
- B&B accommodation
- Emergency bed provision available for short-term periods only
- Direct access floor space for rough sleepers

The Housing Solutions Team also manage applications to and nominations from the Common Housing Register.

In preparation for the Act the Housing Solutions Team's existing case management system was redesigned to allow accurate and efficient case management of homelessness. One method the Housing Solutions Team have developed and utilise to achieve positive outcomes is the 'Spend to Save Scheme'. The scheme offers discretionary payments, which saves the Authority and other services greater expenditure by preventing the escalation of a situation.

An example of this is helping an applicant with a cash bond or rent in advance of £500 to secure a private rented property, preventing the need for costly temporary accommodation, which could cost over £4000.

3.2 Embedded Services

There are several non-statutory services embedded within the Housing Solutions Team. Embedding services has created positive working relationships between organisations and enables a seamless, holistic service to applicants.

The services below are currently embedded within the Housing Solutions Team and consideration will be given to further embedding of services going forward.

- A family mediation service specialising in providing mediation support to families, where a young person aged 16-25 is or is at risk of becoming homeless. The service works with both the young person and their family to improve relationships and prevent a young person being asked to leave or facilitate a return home.
- A homelessness prevention and financial advice service, which provides independent advice and support on a variety of matters including; security of tenure / possession proceedings, homelessness, disrepair, debt / money matter, maximisation of income.
- The Bond Board Scheme assists people on a low income to find and secure privately rented accommodation. The service issues bond certificates which cover the cost of a deposit on a privately rented property.
- Integrated domestic abuse services, based in the Councils domestic abuse 'one stop shop' (Assia Suite) provides confidential, specialist support to victims of domestic abuse, including supporting victims to flee from perpetrators, by accessing refuge accommodation.

3.3 Supporting People Programme Grant

The Supporting People Programme Grant (SPPG) from Welsh Government is an early intervention programme which prevents people from becoming homeless or helps homeless people to find and keep accommodation. It also helps some of the boroughs most vulnerable people to live independently in their own home or supported housing. In Bridgend County Borough the SPPG currently funds:

- Alarm services, including for sheltered accommodation and telecare services.
- Temporary / Supported Accommodation for:

- ❖ Homeless adults
 - ❖ Homeless families
 - ❖ Direct access provision for those whom the Local Authority have no duty to accommodate.
 - ❖ Young persons aged 16-21
 - ❖ Those with mental health issues
 - ❖ Vulnerable and chaotic service users
 - ❖ Those with substance misuse histories
 - ❖ Those with learning disabilities
- Floating support for:
 - ❖ Generic housing related support needs
 - ❖ Private landlords and tenants
 - ❖ Those with criminal offending histories
 - ❖ Older persons
 - ❖ Refugees

Housing Support at older persons 'extra care' schemes.

- Domestic abuse services, including:
 - ❖ Refuge
 - ❖ Drop in and floating support
 - ❖ Perpetrator programme
 - ❖ Support for young persons

As of June 2018 the SPPG funded services the county borough had the following breakdown:

Fixed Supported Accommodation	Number of Units
Alarm Services (Sheltered Accommodation & Telecare)	2886
Other	10
Families with Support Needs	16
People over 55 years of age (Extra Care)	39
People with Learning Disabilities	111
People with Mental Health Issues	21
People with Substance Misuse Issues	5
Single People with Support Needs	22
Women experiencing Domestic Abuse	13
Young people who are care leavers	12
Young People with Support Needs (16 to 24)	30
Grand Total	3165

Floating Support	Number of Units (min)
Families with Support Needs	20
Generic / Floating Support	488
People over 55 years of age	90
People with Criminal Offending History	15
People with Mental Health Issues	204
People with Physical and / or Sensory Disabilities	10
People with Refugee Status	6
Single People with Support Needs	3
Women experiencing Domestic Abuse	92
Young people who are care leavers	85
Young People with Support Needs (16 to 24)	35
Grand Total	1048

3.4 Private Rented Sector

Working closely with the private rented sector is imperative to successfully prevent and relieve homelessness. The Local Authority has a number of initiatives to achieve this:

- The Bridgend Landlords Forum meets regularly and is well attended by private sector landlords who let properties across the county borough. The Forum is an opportunity for the Local Authority and landlords to communicate, share information and best practice.
- The 'Early Doors' service, funded by the Supporting People Programme Grant, enables landlords to ask for help on the tenant's behalf, at a stage before the situation becomes more critical. An 'Early Doors' support worker will work impartially with both landlord and tenant to try to resolve any issues and hopefully reach an agreeable solution to avoid an eviction.
- The 'Bridgend Bond Board' issues bond certificates to cover the cost of a deposit on a rented property. This provides a guarantee to landlords that they will receive payment up to the value of the Bond if the tenancy ends prematurely. The service also supports tenants in the move and resettlement process, promoting positive relationships with local landlords.
- Working to achieve the aims of the Empty Property Strategy, the Empty Property Co-ordinator works with private sector landlords to reduce empty properties across the county borough and help contribute towards increasing the availability of housing for sale or for rent. An Empty Homes Grant is available to landlords to help with the cost of any works. Properties that receive the grant must be rented at the rate of the Local Housing Allowance for a minimum period of 3 years. Properties are rented to people nominated by the Housing Solutions Team, and includes homeless households.

3.5 Affordable Housing

To shape the provision of new-build accommodation and maximise the amount of Social Housing Grant and supplementary grants in partnership with Registered Social Landlords and Welsh Government, there have been 351 units of affordable housing delivered in the county borough from 2015-16 to 2017-18. This includes social rented housing and intermediate housing (housing at a cost above social rents, but below private rents or market value). Intermediate housing can include low cost homes for sale or intermediate rent.

3.6 Current Developments

In this Strategy Bridgend County Borough Council explore where the Local Authority wants to be by 2022 and how the Local Authority will achieve this. Work is already being undertaken to accomplish these aims and the following are examples of some of this:

- The Housing Solutions Team have recently appointed a Gateway Development Officer, whose responsibility it will be to develop and manage a Gateway for support services, including supported accommodation. A Gateway improves accessibility to support services and allows for better monitoring of provision, ensuring that those in most need

have access to services required and those ready to move on are supported to do so in a timely manner.

- In preparation for winter 2018 the Local Authority has developed a co-ordinated approach with third sector partners, expanding and increasing services ensuring appropriate provision for homeless persons through the winter months. An afternoon service has been developed in and around Bridgend Town Centre, which will allow homeless people to access a safe, dry, warm and friendly environment to escape poor weather. This is a pilot, which will help inform future provision, with early feedback suggesting that it is having a positive impact not only on service user's welfare, but crime and anti-social behaviour, particularly in the town centre.
- The Housing Solutions Team are currently going through a commissioning exercise to procure a Housing First service. The service will specifically look to support and accommodate complex, entrenched rough sleepers using a non-traditional support method. The service start date will be 1st January 2019.
- The Supporting People Team are working closely with internal mental health and substance misuse services to develop pilot mental health and substance misuse outreach support services. One mental health outreach worker has already been recruited and it is hoped that both services will be fully operational by February 2019.
- To further build on adaptations made to our Housing Solutions I.T / case management system, a new system is being implemented which provides a customer portal, allowing people to make and manage their applications online. This will improve our triage approach, helping to reduce the need for people to repeat their story and will contribute to increasing capacity within the Housing Solutions Team.
- To develop a clear pathway for both young persons and staff, work is being undertaken to develop a joint protocol between Housing and Social Services, with regards to an accommodation pathway for looked after children and young person's presenting as homeless.

4.0 Where do Bridgend County Borough Council want to be?

It is our ambition to continually improve our housing and homelessness services, to realise our vision for homelessness in the county borough. The Local Authority has therefore developed four key aims to help us achieve this.

Aims	Objectives to achieve the aims
<p>Improve collaboration between external organisations and the statutory functions within the Local Authority.</p>	<p>Enable the statutory functions of the Local Authority e.g. Housing, Social Services and Education to meet more regularly with the goal of ensuring a Council wide approach to preventing and relieving homelessness.</p> <p>Ensure commitment to tackling homelessness is explicitly enshrined within all statutory plans, including Registered Social Landlords.</p> <p>Create a forum(s) where key partners, including users of services, Registered Social Landlords, private landlords and the third sector, can highlight challenges, opportunities and plan provision.</p> <p>Co-produce clear pathways that are easy to navigate for both organisations and users of services where there is clarity of roles and responsibilities.</p>
<p>Improve working arrangements between the Local Authority and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to facilitate co-operation in line with Section 95 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.</p>	<p>Enable the Local Authority and RSLs to meet more regularly to allow for consistency and improve existing processes e.g. providing timely information, sharing risk assessments and allowing opportunities for joint working.</p> <p>Work in partnership to seek alternatives to evictions for rent arrears and anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>Maximise the accommodation and support available to alleviate homelessness e.g. availability of more shared accommodation and more supported housing for people with complex needs.</p> <p>Devise mutually agreed formal agreements and/or key performance indicators.</p>
<p>Improve how people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness access services.</p>	<p>Advance existing 'triage' services utilising online and telephone methods to allow for better information and advice at the first point of contact.</p> <p>Facilitate an environment for sensitive or confidential discussions to take place and reduce the amount of times people have to share their personal and traumatic stories, before they can access the service they require.</p> <p>Increase staff capacity, allowing for more timely interventions and reducing unnecessary and more costly escalation of issues.</p>

	<p>Consider opportunities to co-locate or joint manage statutory and non-statutory services, which reflect the wide, complex and co-existing challenges some homeless people face.</p>
<p>Improve the accessibility and availability of support and accommodation options for all service users.</p>	<p>Review the diversity of housing related support provision, to ensure inclusivity, especially for those people excluded from services or who re-present as homeless.</p> <p>Ensure suitable accommodation options are available for people with a history of co-existing mental health and substance misuse challenges and serious offending histories, including history of arson or sex offences.</p> <p>Consider the implications of increasing levels and the changing demographic of homeless presentations and ensure that support and accommodation options are suitable to meet needs.</p> <p>Maximise the use of existing funding streams, such as the Supporting People Grant and Social Housing Grant, responding to changing needs and explore alternative funding streams and joint collaboration, such as between statutory agencies to achieve bespoke support and accommodation options, to prevent homelessness</p>

5.0 How will Bridgend County Borough Council deliver and monitor the Strategy?

A multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Delivery Group will be established to implement this Strategy. Where necessary, sub-groups will be set up to deliver specific objectives within the Strategy. The Delivery Group will prepare an annual report outlining the progress made in achieving the aims and objectives.

The Local Authority Corporate Plan and the Directorate Business Plans will specify the actions and performance indicators which will contribute towards achieving the aims and objectives within this Strategy. The Corporate Plan is prepared on a 3 year cycle and the Directorate Business Plans updated annually. The actions within the Directorate Business Plans will be monitored on a quarterly basis, and those of corporate importance will be reported to Cabinet through the quarterly Corporate Performance Assessment.

It is acknowledged that whilst the Local Authority has taken the lead in developing this document, the Strategy is owned by all statutory and non-statutory partners who work together to prevent and relieve homelessness within the county borough.

APPENDIX 1 – LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Part 2 of The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 amends and consolidates all previous homelessness legislation in Wales.

The Act ensures a greater emphasis is placed on prevention of homelessness and places new statutory duties on local authorities. Key features of the legislation include:

- A new duty to help anyone threatened with homelessness within 56 days;
- A duty to provide help to any homeless person to help them secure a suitable home;
- A power rather than a duty to apply the intentionality test;
- New powers for local authorities to discharge their homelessness duties through finding accommodation in the private rented sector;
- Stronger duties on Housing Associations to support local authorities in carrying out their homelessness duties.

The purpose of the legislation is to achieve:

- Fewer households experiencing the trauma of homelessness;
- Better, more targeted, prevention work;
- Increased help, advice and information for households who receive limited assistance under the current legislation;
- More focus on the service user, helping them to address the causes of homelessness and make informed decisions on finding solutions to their housing problem;
- More effective use of the private rented sector as a solution to homelessness;
- A stronger emphasis on co-operation and multi-agency working;
- Greater protection provided for children in households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness as well as additional help for children leaving care.

Section 50 of the Act places a duty on the Authority to carry out a Homelessness Review for its area and then formulate and adopt a Homelessness Strategy, based on the results of that review. Any review and strategy must look at the achievement of the following objectives:

- The prevention of homelessness;
- That suitable accommodation is and will be available for people who are or may become homeless;
- That satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless.

Additional legislative and regulatory background

In drafting this Strategy the following legislative and regulatory have also been taken into account:

- 10 Year Homelessness Plan for Wales 2009-2019
- Equality Act 2010
- Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations 2014
- National pathway for homelessness services to children, young people and adults in the secure estate in Wales
- National Housing Pathway for Ex-Service Personnel
- Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014
- Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014
- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2015
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015
- Code of Guidance to Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness, 2016
- Bridgend County Borough Council Corporate Plan - One Council Working Together to Improve Lives 2016-20
- Wales Audit Office Report “How Local Government manages demand – Homelessness” January 2018
- Welsh Government Rough Sleeping Action Plan 2018-20
- Welfare Benefit Reforms