Title: Policy failure or f*** up: homelessness and welfare reform in the UK

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Abstract:

Homelessness is on the rise (NAO, 2017). There is growing evidence that welfare reforms are a key driver of this increase. The introduction of the Local Housing Allowance in 2008, and subsequent changes in 2011 and 2016, coincided with a fourfold increase in the number of homeless households from the private rented sector (O'Leary, O'Shea and Albertson, 2018). The rollout of Universal Credit is contributing to an increase in rent arrears and is associated with significant issues around homelessness (Simcock, 2018). There is also evidence that changes to Housing Benefit in relation to social tenants, the so called 'bedroom tax', has driven homelessness (Gibb, 2015).

But does this mean that welfare reform has failed? In this paper, we use policy failure as a lens through which to critically examine welfare reform and homelessness in the UK. This is not an easy task. Policy failure is poorly conceptualised and under-researched area of policy analysis (Gibb, 2015). Drawing on McConnell's definition of failure (2015), which seeks to bridge the gap between objective definitions of policy failure (where failure is understood as the gap between policy objectives and actual outcomes) and subjective definitions (where failure is understood as actors' perceptions), we examine welfare reform and homelessness to understand whether, how and by whom policy in this area might be considered to have failed.