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# Provision for Young Care Leavers at Risk of Homelessness

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## Summary

- The care leaver population in Wales has risen by 18% since 2011 but levels of statutory homelessness amongst this group are relatively steady over the last three years.
- The main cause of homelessness is tenancy failure: the young age of care leavers, lack of preparation and experience in managing alone contribute to this.
- Some care leavers are at higher risk of homelessness than others: the level of support required by those with complex and multiple needs usually exceeds what is provided through Supporting People provision.
- The 'When I Am Ready' scheme will support some care leavers to stay with ex-foster carers but for many at higher risk of homelessness this is less likely to be an option.
- The effectiveness of joint working between Housing and Children's Service and Supporting People provision for care leavers varies considerably across Wales.
- Local authorities report reduced supply of social and private rented housing options.
- Landlord confidence in young people as tenants is generally low, across both the social and private sector. Being economically active, financially literate and being able to sustain settled accommodation are intrinsically linked.
- The new homelessness legislation provides an opportunity to prevent homelessness amongst care leavers through earlier joint planning, linked to pathway planning.
- Improved data collection and analysis would help increase national and local understanding of homelessness for this group and assist in commissioning.
- Preparation for independence, including financial literacy and expectation management are key factors to address.
- The importance of consistent support from a trusted adult cannot be over-stated in terms of what can make a difference to care leavers' success as young adults.
- A national framework or 'pathway' for accommodation and support could help improve the consistency of provision of services to this group across Wales.
- The Government could take more measures to eliminate the use of unsuitable accommodation for this group.
- Joint commissioning could reduce the probability of poor outcomes for care leavers, including periods of homelessness and reduce long term costs to the public purse across health, criminal justice, welfare, social care and housing sectors.
- There are numerous examples of innovation across local authorities, Third Sector agencies and housing associations. Sharing of what works well is a key factor in reducing homelessness and improving a range of outcomes for care leavers.

## Introduction

This report was requested by the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty to highlight the current issues surrounding young people leaving care who are at risk of homelessness, and to consider how improvements might be made to reduce and eliminate homelessness for this group.

Safe, decent and affordable housing is a foundation stone for any young person's success (Coatham & Lazarus, 2011). Many young people leaving care do have successful transitions to adulthood, going on to achieve in education, gain skills and qualifications through training and having careers. There have been improvements in relation to outcomes for young people leaving care generally since the implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (Dixon et al, 2004). Policy developments to support care leavers are continuing, including a new duty to enable young people to stay with their foster carers beyond the age of 18. The 'When I Am Ready' scheme is contained with the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 and will be implemented in 2016.

There are a significant proportion of young people leaving care aged 16, 17 or 18 who experience a range of difficulties, often over several years, as they make their transition to adulthood. One of the most common features of a poor transition to adulthood is housing instability, risk of homelessness and actual homelessness.

The report firstly outlines the extent of known homelessness amongst care leavers in Wales and then looks at the major underlying reasons why homelessness and housing instability continue to be so prevalent amongst the leaving care population. Some of the causes of current and future housing need relate to new challenges for all young people on low incomes in terms of housing supply generally, with reduced choice and problems with affordability.

The report looks at what is working well, some innovative examples of best practice and some opportunities to improve support to care leavers at risk of homelessness into independence. All of these are set against the backdrop of the current housing market conditions and welfare reform policy which is driving some of the changes. Recommendations are made which aim to address some of the key challenges and promote improved outcomes for care leavers.

The report has been written using information and ideas from research, a range of reports, available data and the author's own experience of working in youth homelessness and leaving care settings. A short survey was sent by PPIW to all Housing and Children's Services

Authorities, a small group discussion with some local authorities was held and some feedback from Third Sector providers also informed the report. We would like to thank those local authorities and other organisations for taking the time to share their knowledge.

## An Overview of Accommodation and Support Pathways for Young People Leaving Care

There is no blueprint for the housing route young people take when they leave care in Wales. The range of life experiences, care settings, individual aspirations, relationships with carers and for some, birth families, as well as local policy and service provision mean young people's journeys when they leave care vary considerably. At 18 some care leavers will continue to stay with their foster carers, others will start with a move into a young people's supported accommodation scheme and progress into their own tenancy over time. Some return to live with their family. A relatively small proportion go to university or move into accommodation provided through their employment or training course. Some will go straight into their own tenancy in social housing or the private rented sector. The only national data on accommodation type is recorded in a care leavers' 19<sup>th</sup> year by their local authority.

**Table 1:** Accommodation types for care leavers in their 19<sup>th</sup> year in Wales in 2013/14. NB some reporting categories have been grouped for the purposes of this table.

Accommodation type	Number of 19 year olds	% of 19 year olds
Suitable - supported accommodation – includes supported lodgings, supported/semi-independent accommodation and foyers	92	20.1%
Suitable - With parents or birth family	70	15.3%
Suitable - In independent accommodation – a tenancy or university	180	39.3%
Suitable - In other specified accommodation - includes community homes, specialist NHS provision, unsupported lodgings, custody or bed and breakfast	37	8%
Suitable - other unspecified suitable accommodation	20	4.3%
In unsuitable accommodation - includes emergency accommodation, independent accommodation, custody, bed and breakfast, living with family and other unspecified	28	6.1%
Not known	30	6.5%
Total	457	100%

Sources: StatsWales homelessness data from 2013/14

The features of successful move on from care typically include stability of care placements, the forming of secure attachment relationships, usually with foster carers and leaving care with some educational qualifications (Stein & Morris, 2010). The importance of these factors are well understood by Children's Social Services across Wales. The improvements needed locally will vary and the general issues related to these challenges go beyond the remit of this report.

Whilst the issue of 'bricks and mortar' is a key one in terms of available housing options for care leavers, their successful transitions are also premised on the quality of the support they receive. The importance of relationships with trusted adults and the continuity of that support cannot be under-estimated, in terms of what makes the difference to care leavers. Without suitable accommodation *and* support, the outcomes for many care leavers across a range of domains – in employment, physical and mental health, offending and homelessness will remain poor.

## The Extent of Homelessness Amongst Care Leavers

Research over many years has consistently shown that care leavers are a group at much higher risk of homelessness than their peers. They are significantly over-represented in any sample of homeless young people or adults. Based on recent studies, somewhere between 20% – 30% of all young homeless people have been in care (Centrepoin, 2010; Crisis, 2012).

Homelessness amongst young people, including care leavers, is often hidden and is currently not recorded in a way that gives an accurate picture. The extent of homelessness and housing instability amongst care leavers is significant but is hard to quantify as a result.

The statutory homelessness data<sup>1</sup> recorded by local authorities for the Welsh Government up to March 2015 gives a partial insight, but should be treated with some caution because:

- the 'Priority Need' group that care leavers aged 18-20 fall into also includes other 'vulnerable' young people and there is no system in place to differentiate between sub-groups within this category;

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/homelessness/?lang=en> . Part 7 of the 1994 Housing Act sets out 4 statutory tests: Is the person eligible for assistance? Are they homeless? Do they fit into a priority need group? Note there is a Priority Need group or vulnerable young people 18 – 20 which includes care leavers. Are they intentionally homeless? The other test is a non-statutory test - do they have a local connection?

- the available national data sets do not include the number of care leavers who were found to be ‘intentionally homeless’ and thus not owed the main homelessness duty<sup>2</sup>;
- care leavers approaching a local authority at risk of homelessness have not been recorded on the national system unless their homelessness could not be prevented, so the extent of imminent homelessness and housing need has been hidden;
- some care leavers will have their imminent or actual homelessness prevented through their Personal Adviser/leaving care service without needing to present as homeless and go down the statutory homeless route;
- some care leavers will not approach a local authority for help and will find their own solutions to housing needs and homelessness.

Under the new Housing (Wales) Act 2014 Part 2, the reporting arrangements for homelessness have changed and it is expected that a more complete picture of national homelessness and housing need will emerge. This, combined with the new local authority duty to conduct regular homelessness reviews (Welsh Government, 2015), should reveal more accurately the number of care leavers at risk of homelessness and the outcomes for them<sup>3</sup>.

Based on the current data, despite its shortcomings, the numbers of vulnerable 18-20 year olds being accepted as homeless appears to be relatively steady. The national data is backed up by local housing authorities reporting that overall there has not been an increase in the number of care leavers being found to be homeless (PPIW survey, 2015) . This is against the backdrop in Wales of a significant rise in the number of young people aged 16 and over who are looked after, which has risen by 25% and young people leaving care between 2011 – 2014, which has increased by 18%<sup>4</sup>. It is also worth considering this is in light of an overall decrease in homelessness acceptances in Wales.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on survey returns from housing authorities for this report, May 2015: 10 out of 14 Housing Authorities who replied said they had not made an ‘Intentional Homeless’ decision on a care leaver in 2014/15 and many stressed they tried to avoid doing so wherever possible. Some had corporate policies that meant such a decision was not permissible.

<sup>3</sup> When housing authorities were asked if they thought there would be a positive impact on overall levels of homelessness amongst care leavers as a result of the new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness the answers were not consistently positive. One authority believed there would be less time to help care leavers because of the additional demands the new duties bring.

<sup>4</sup> StatsWales data from 2011– 2014: children looked after by local authority, age and gender – the 16/17 year olds age group has risen from 780 in 2011 to 975 in 2014, an increase of 25%; and care leavers cohort aged 19 year old rose from 387 in 2011 to 458 in 2014, an increase of 18%

**Table 2:** Statutory acceptance of 18-20 year old care leavers as homeless

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total number of 18-20 year old acceptances, (including other vulnerable young people and care leavers)</b>	<b>Total number of all acceptances</b>	<b>18 – 20 year old acceptances as a % of all acceptances</b>
2011/12	150	6,515	2.3%
2012/13	130	5,795	2.2%
2013/14	145	5,115	2.8%

Sources: StatsWales homelessness data from 2011– 2014

Qualitative research more accurately captures the extent of housing need and instability, including homelessness, for many young people leaving care. Research shows that around a third of care leavers experience homelessness in the 6 – 24 months after leaving care (Wade & Dixon, 2006). A more recent report (Centre for Social Justice, 2014) found half of the care leavers surveyed had difficulty in securing accommodation that was safe and stable when they left care.

Homelessness can endure in the lives of some of the most vulnerable care leavers, well beyond the age of 21, when statutory duties to most care leavers end. Recent extensive research (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2015) looked at the extent and causes of severe and multiple exclusion<sup>5</sup> amongst adults of all ages. They found that 18% of the sample group with the very highest level of disadvantage had experience of being in care as a child.

## The Underlying Causes of Homelessness

The question of why care leavers continue to be so vulnerable to homelessness is much more complex than the extent of their individual damaging childhood experiences. With the exception of some newly looked after 16/17 year olds, care leavers are a known population, in terms of their needs and individual circumstances. Research and inspection reports over many years ( Stein, 2006; Barnardos, 2014a; Action for Children, 2014; CSSIW, 2015) have pointed out that care leavers are vulnerable not only because of their own life experiences but as a result of organisational systems and behaviours which do not consistently provide services to meet their - arguably well understood - needs. Their transitions to adulthood are

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<sup>5</sup> Severe and multiple exclusion is defined as a combination of enduring homelessness, mental health problems, substance misuse and offending behaviour – see Bramley, G. and Fitzpartick, S. 2015.

usually compressed and accelerated (Stein, 2006). This is not specific to Wales, but is a UK wide and international issue.

This section of the report looks at a range of factors which underpin the causes of homelessness amongst young care leavers: the needs of care leavers experiencing homelessness; preparation for leaving care; joint planning and working at the point of leaving care; the provision of supported accommodation options and the general supply and affordability of housing for young people.

### **What are the needs of young care leavers experiencing homelessness?**

It is well understood that young people leaving care have a range of needs that make homelessness much more likely (Action for Children, 2014). Whilst it is important to recognise that the vast majority of care leavers are likely to have had difficult and damaging childhoods, some young people leaving care are at higher risk of homelessness than others. Factors that increase the risk of homelessness include:

- Leaving care at 16 and 17 years of age;
- Having social, emotional, mental health and behavioural problems;
- Being involved in the criminal justice system
- Running away from care in the past;
- Being a young disabled person who does not meet the threshold for adult services – for example, young people with a low level learning disability;
- Being a young asylum seeker;
- Those who experience negative and multiple moves in care and after care;
- Young people who return to their birth family after leaving care

(Stein and Morris, 2010; Barnardos, 2014a; Action for Children, 2014).

There is anecdotal reporting from local authorities regarding an increase in the proportion of young people leaving care having complex or multiple needs (PPIW survey, 2015; Homeless Link, 2014). These are young people who have a range of problems or difficulties at the same time, such as poor mental health, emotional and behavioural problems, attachment disorder, learning disability, developmental delay, drug and alcohol misuse and offending behavior.

The general view is that the majority of young people within this group will not get the opportunity to stay with carers under the 'When I Am Ready' programme, because they have had a series of moves and have no settled foster care placement. This is further supported by

research which highlights those who are most at risk of poor outcomes leave care earlier or at crisis point, as a result of a placement breakdown (Stein, 2005).

Research highlights that children who become looked after aged 11 and over are more likely to have had experienced insecure or weak attachment relationships (The Care Inquiry, 2013; Hannon et al., 2010). Some will have spent large proportions of their childhood on the 'edge' of care. This group are more likely to experience several placement moves once in care and subsequently become homeless.

The proportion of the newly looked after population who are aged 11 and over in Wales has not increased significantly since 2007/08, although it has fluctuated between 35% and 39%. Within this, there is a significant increase in new admissions of 16 and 17 years olds<sup>6</sup> who are anecdotally reported to be generally harder to engage with for leaving care services and other agencies. The increase in numbers is largely attributed to:

- the impact of the 2009 R(G) v London Borough of Southwark House of Lords judgment, which clarified that in the case of a homeless 16/17 year old, children's law takes precedence over housing law and these young people would become looked after if their homelessness could not be prevented;
- changes to the legal status of under 18 years olds who are now looked after if they are remanded into custody.<sup>7</sup>

Part of the increase may also be due to the improved understanding and awareness of child sexual exploitation and associated safeguarding issues and admissions into care as a result.

There has been a national policy presumption across Wales and England that Supporting People provision of 'housing related support' with some additional support from leaving care services can somehow meet the needs of those with complex and multiple needs, but evidence<sup>8</sup> indicates this is not the case. The level of support required to meet their needs goes way beyond what housing related support is meant to cover.

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<sup>6</sup> In 2010/11 there were 119 new admissions into care of 16/17 year olds, but by 2013/14 this has risen to 242 young people, in effect a doubling of this age group.

<sup>7</sup> The Legal Aid, Punishment and Sentencing of Offenders Act 2012 changed the legal status of all remanded under 18 year olds, who are deemed looked after until they are released from custody or begin a custodial sentence.

<sup>8</sup> From the PPIW survey: when asked what the most common structural or service –related issues that resulted in homelessness amongst care leavers was, the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest cause was '*Limited supported accommodation options for those with complex or multiple needs.*' Also evidence from a discussion group with local authorities and the author's work with local authorities.

There is a financial cost to long term multiple exclusion, as well as the impact on the individual and often on local communities. As budget pressures increase, the long term cost-benefit business case for public sector agencies to do things differently for those with complex and multiple needs is compelling (Hannon et al., 2010; Barnardos, 2014a; Battrick et al, 2014; Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2015). Addressing this recognised gap in services is not an easy challenge for local authorities, as there is limited statutory basis to do so.

### **Preparation for leaving care**

There have been numerous attempts to address the ad hoc nature of preparation for leaving care over decades (Stein, 2006; National Care Advisory Service, 2009), from statutory guidance to toolkits. The nature of preparation is still very varied across local authorities and often within them. The 'cliff edge' of a move out of care around their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday still persists for most care leavers, whether or not they are prepared and ready to succeed.

Whilst 49% of young people in Wales aged 20 – 24 are still living with a parent (Office of National Statistics, 2014a) and only 8% of all 20 – 34 year olds in the UK are living alone (Office of National Statistics, 2012) many care leavers are moving out of care and in to some form of independence when they are just 18, or in some cases, when they are still aged 16 or 17.

Care leavers identified by local authorities in the survey at a very high risk of homelessness were those who are *'aged 18 and over who go into tenancies of their own but are too young or inexperienced to manage living alone and 'fail' as a result.'*

The difficulties of consistently and effectively preparing young people for leaving care are well documented (CSSIW, 2015; Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2011). Acquiring the blend of practical household skills, financial literacy, emotional resilience and well-being and an ability to manage relationships with others is a challenge for any young person aged 18 (The Care Leavers Foundation, 2010; Consumer Focus Wales, 2011; Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2011; CSSIW, 2015).

The vast majority of young people – whether they are looked after or not - aged 18 are not ready to succeed in their own tenancy. They are too young - brain development is still underway (Aamodt & Wang, 2012), they are too inexperienced, have the lowest incomes of all adults and many report they are very lonely when they do live alone. Going into a tenancy at 18 for most care leavers is, in effect, a fast track to failure.

Training flats are seen as very positive, giving young people a few weeks of practice at living independently so they can understand the realities of living alone. For example, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the Housing authority have worked with Children's Social Services, RCT Homes and NCH (Welsh Housing Quarterly, March 2010) to provide a training flat for assessment and to give them a taste of independence. This sort of provision can assist some young people, giving them more understanding of what is involved and may deter some from wanting to move on to their own tenancy without some sort of supported housing options first.

New duties in the Social Care and Well Being Act 2014 enable young people to stay with foster carers after they reach the age of 18 have been widely welcomed. The new duties formalise what has already been happening in practice, to a greater or lesser degree, in local authorities across Wales. The 'When I am Ready' scheme will not be available for all care leavers, as it requires an agreement between a foster carer and the young person<sup>9</sup>.

When local authorities were asked in the PPIW survey to identify the most common structural or service-related issues that cause homelessness, they most frequently highlighted: *'Young people's expectations do not match with the realities of living independently (i.e. a lack of sufficient preparation emotionally and practically)'*.

The mismatch between the expectations of young people and the reality of living alone was a theme running throughout the PPIW survey returns. Whilst many older teenagers in care say they want their own flat or house as soon as they leave care, numerous reports into leaving care show that with hindsight, older care leavers take a different view (Barnardos, 2014a).

Planning for the future away from care is difficult for young people, most of whom feel understandably anxious and want a safe and settled home of their own as quickly as possible. The pattern of planning for permanence<sup>10</sup> often continues as a theme into many young people's transition planning, with a social housing tenancy often being viewed by young people and some professionals as the preferred option at 18. This is understandable, but arguably it is not always in young people's best interests, given the high rate of tenancy failure. Policies and practices usually give care leavers some additional preference in allocations schemes, although in many, the option is only activated when a young person is deemed ready. In the

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<sup>9</sup> In particular those with complex and multiple needs who have had a number of placement moves as teenagers are less likely to have a settled foster care placement and therefore not have this as an option

<sup>10</sup> Planning for long term looked after children focuses on permanence, finding settled placements and for some children, adoption.

future, with a shortage of one-bed accommodation and affordability barriers (see below), the option as a standard 'offer' to care leavers may not be viable in some local authority areas.

It is a challenge for local authorities to achieve a culture shift and change their messaging to young people, in a way that does not create anxiety, but does not perpetuate the expectation of moving straight into independence. The reality of housing options (see below) means the new message is likely to be that a move into decent, affordable accommodation is something to aspire to and will happen when they are ready - emotionally, practically and increasingly, financially.

### **Joint planning and joint working at the point of leaving care**

The level of joint planning between Children's Services and Housing Departments varies considerably across Wales. Where services are more integrated<sup>11</sup>, the extent and quality of joint planning is generally better (PPIW survey, 2015; CCSIW 2015; Dixon et al 2004). Often in more integrated arrangements there is also a strong working relationship with one or more Third Sector providers who specialise in youth homelessness and housing. Integration can take several forms, such as:

- a housing specialist placed in a leaving care service;
- a dedicated young people's accommodation officer within a housing options service;
- a fully integrated young people's service, dealing with a range of issues for care leavers, including accommodation.

Where integration of service delivery exists, there are reports of other benefits, which perpetuate service improvement, for example: regular communication, better understanding of each other's roles and service pressures, improved corporate commitment, a high level of trust, more involvement of the voluntary sector, shared innovation and more supported housing options. These benefits can exist where local authorities are not delivering a joint service, but it is harder to achieve and sustain them (PPIW survey, 2015; Dixon et al., 2004).

Most local authorities had joint protocols but said they needed to update them. One which did not have a joint protocol had a highly integrated approach, including a joint budget for care leavers. Some reported their protocols were out of date or not working.

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<sup>11</sup> Half of the housing authorities which responded to the survey had some kind of integrated approach, whilst one of the six Children's Services authorities who responded did. Two local authorities said the numbers of care leavers were so small that integration was not viable.

In most local authorities which responded to the PPIW survey, housing staff were not routinely involved in the statutory pathway planning<sup>12</sup>. The variability of pathway planning outlined in the survey returns mirrors the findings in a recent thematic inspection report across Wales (CSSIW, 2015).

The current approach in most local authorities is involvement on a 'when needed' basis from a Housing representative. Some Housing representatives in the survey indicated that early routine involvement in pathway planning would be more effective at preventing homelessness (PPIW survey, 2015). This would be more in line with the aims of the new homelessness legislation.

A theme through several of the survey returns was of good working arrangements for homeless 16/17 year olds, including joint protocols and dedicated specialist staff, but more of a gap around joint work for care leavers. This is likely to be as a result of developing a local response to the G V Southwark Judgment following a Wales-wide initiative to improve joint working around this group (Inkson, 2014).

### **The provision of supported accommodation options**

The picture in Wales of supported accommodation for young care leavers is varied. This is in part a result of geography, demography and socio-economic factors but also reflects other factors including local joint working, planning, priority setting and commissioning decisions. This sort of variation is highlighted in other areas of local authority practice with children and young people (Welsh Local Government Association, Cordis Bright & ADSS, 2013).

The total spend on young people's supported accommodation through the Supporting People programme in 2014/15 was £15,565,000, providing 1,574 units of supported accommodation. Of this, £904,000 was specifically on care leaver provision, providing 88 dedicated units, although care leavers can access any generic young people's provision as well. In the same year 309 care leavers were recorded as accessing Supporting People provision across Wales, with 2,555 other young people aged 16 - 25 doing so as well.

Before outlining some gaps and challenges, it is important to emphasise that there are numerous examples of highly effective local partnerships and services some of which will be

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<sup>12</sup> There is a statutory duty to prepare and regularly review a pathway plan for each young person who is eligible for leaving care services under the provisions of the Children ( Leaving Care) Act 2000 aged 16 – 21 ( or up to 25 for those in further education or training). The Plan should cover every element of the young persons life, including housing/accommodation plans. Of the 14 housing authorities who replied to the survey, only 3 said there was routine involvement and of the 6 Children's Services Authorities, 1 said there was routine involvement. These were all in local authorities with an integrated model of delivery for care leavers.

drawn on later in this report. Innovation, shared commitment and a passion across Third Sector provider agencies and local authorities to support young people are not in short supply.

There was positive feedback from several local authorities regarding providers of supported accommodation (PPIW Survey, 2015). They are often more than a provider of services, playing a role as a strategic partner. High levels of trust and co-operation characterise these types of relationships, despite the difficulties of Supporting People budget reductions. Provider agencies can often bring added value through innovation and securing additional funding from charitable trusts or funding programmes to deliver a wide range of programmes/services to enhance good outcomes for young people.

The variety of accommodation and support options in some authorities enable young people, including young parents, to be matched to and progress through provision until they are ready for their own tenancy. For example, a well-developed 'menu' of accommodation and support 'pathway' might include:

- Nightstop/emergency supported lodgings;
- Other short stay emergency accommodation, such as short stay assessment units or 'ring fenced' beds in longer stay suitable provision;
- Long term supported lodgings in a host's home;
- 'When I Am Ready' arrangements with ex-foster carers;
- Supported accommodation projects with 24 hour support for those with higher levels of needs;
- Supported accommodation projects with call out cover for those with medium level needs;
- 'Step down' provision - smaller units of shared housing with floating support, but often still attached to the larger projects in a 'core and cluster' type arrangement;
- Floating support into a young person's home – usually a general needs or private rented sector tenancy.

But there were recurring gaps and challenges, with some authorities reporting no choice for care leavers – in effect a 'one size has to fit all' provision. In some authorities there was not enough provision to meet demand. One authority reported that Children's Services were commissioning some additional supported accommodation units separately for care leavers. Another reported that there was a 12-month waiting list for supported accommodation for care leavers (PPIW Survey, 2015).

There is a generally a risk of further 'silt-up' of young people's housing schemes in many areas of the UK due to lack of move-on options for those who are ready to manage more independently. This does not support their progress in training and employment as the relatively high cost of living in this type of accommodation means many young people have little financial incentive to move into work or apprenticeships (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2011; St. Basils, 2012).

Not enough provision for those with complex or multiple needs was highlighted as a key gap in every authority, as was the lack of emergency accommodation in some areas (PPIW Survey, 2015). Use of mixed age hostels and unsupported temporary accommodation are used to plug these gaps, both of which are recognised as not usually suitable for young people.

The use of bed and breakfast has been widely acknowledged as not suitable for care leavers or other young people (Barnardos, 2014). The variation in usage across Wales was highlighted in the survey returns:

- one large urban authority had not used bed and breakfast for eight years, whilst another large urban authority reported they had placed a high number of care leavers in bed and breakfast last year;
- some authorities reported they use bed and breakfast as a last resort when all other emergency options are full;
- others used bed and breakfast for young people with complex or multiple needs who were excluded from all Supporting People provision due to behaviour;
- for one authority, bed and breakfast was used regularly for young people coming out of custody.

Beyond supported accommodation there are other routes that young people take. Some go to university and there is a duty to support these young people during vacation periods. Local authorities will plan based on the individual circumstances of the young person<sup>13</sup>. The role of Housing in assisting with these vacation plans is minimal, and it was not reported as an area of concern.

A high proportion of young people return to their parents or family after care, even if this is for a short period of time. In 2013/14, 15% of all 19 year olds care leavers were living with family.

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<sup>13</sup> Ways of supporting these young people at university vary e.g. paying an ex-foster carer, or additional rent in halls of residence. One local authority gave young people a lump sum, enabling them to make their own arrangements.

There are often difficulties in this option and young people and families do not always get the support needed to make this work (Bullock et al., 1998; Action for Children, 2014).

### **The general supply and affordability of housing for young people**

The housing routes young care leavers take are increasingly limited (PPIW survey, 2015; CSSIW, 2015). Inextricably linked to social and private rented accommodation is affordability for those on low incomes. The situation does vary significantly across Wales, but the issue of Supporting People budget reductions, general housing supply, affordability and the impact of further welfare reform were identified as the major challenges over the next three years by both Housing Authorities and Children's Services in the survey.

A combination of factors limit access to self-contained one bed social housing:

- A general shortage of one-bed supply. This is not new and is a national issue. Many units of one bed accommodation are sheltered housing, or are designated for older people, or are subject to specifically restricted lettings, excluding, for example, under 40s through local letting policies;
- Increased demand for this size accommodation from those subject to the bedroom tax. Local authorities and housing associations are reducing the risk of arrears and homelessness amongst existing tenants, and prioritise these households within allocations schemes, further reducing access for most young people;
- More generally, as the risk of arrears in social housing increases, many housing associations are undertaking thorough affordability checks before they offer tenancies. Given the lower benefit and minimum wage levels for young people, it is more likely that prospective tenants in this age group will be advised they cannot afford to live in social housing.

Access to the private rented sector (PRS) for young people on benefits or who are low waged is increasingly difficult in many areas in the face of considerable competition from other young people, both students and those in work (Clapham et al, 2012). Care leavers are exempt from the Shared Accommodation Rate until their 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, so one bed self-contained accommodation is in theory an affordable option, but the availability/supply and quality of such accommodation and its real affordability are still key concerns for local authorities. What happens once a young person is 22 is also a consideration if they are still on a low income.

In 2014 45.8% of all 19 year old care leavers in Wales were classed as 'Not in Education,

Employment or Training' (NEET) <sup>14</sup> (StatsWales, 2015). This is over twice the level of their peers<sup>15</sup>. Access to housing is strongly linked to income (Clapham et al, 2012; Quilgars and Rugg, 2015). Landlords are reporting concerns about changes under Universal Credit, whereby the payment of rent will be monthly in arrears to the tenant rather than paid directly on a fortnightly basis to the landlord (National Landlord Association 2013; The Guardian, March 2014).

This general position is exacerbated by Local Housing Allowance rates for private rented accommodation and Housing Benefit rates for social housing being uprated by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than by reference to local rents, severing the link between housing benefit and actual housing costs. The uprating of Local Housing Allowance rates by only 1% for the last two years and Government proposals to freeze most benefit levels for 2 years in 2016 will increase the gap between rents and benefit levels.

Young people are already disadvantaged in the housing market with low wages and insecure work, such as zero-hours contracts being features of the youth employment market. Young people aged 20 – 29 are earning 17% less in real terms than in 2007 (Resolution Foundation, 2014).

A high proportion of care leavers are at risk of housing instability based on their low incomes. More so than ever, proactive help to prepare care leavers to enter the labour market will need to be closely aligned to planning of housing options for this group.

The impact of Universal Credit as a piece of welfare reform will not be fully understood until it has been rolled out and embedded. It was recognised in the PPIW survey as being a major challenge in the next three years, along with lack of supply, general affordability, benefit sanctions and reductions in Supporting People budgets.

## Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers at Risk of Homelessness

There are many examples of innovative practice and what is working well elsewhere that local authorities and their partners can learn from and adapt locally. In addition there are some new opportunities to do things differently at a local level as a result of policy changes. All of these

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<sup>14</sup> This includes young people who were not available for work due to illness, disability, pregnancy or being a young parent.

<sup>15</sup> There is no comparable figure for all 19 year olds in Wales, but the nearest available comparison is from May 2014 when 21.3% of all 16 – 24s were NEET (ONS, 2014).

are set against a backdrop of public sector budget reductions and a presumption that any developments would be service realignment at nil cost or be investments supported by cost benefit analysis to show short, medium or long term savings.

This section outlines some good practice examples and ideas that are relevant to the key challenges raised in the previous Sections of the report:

- Consistency of services across Wales for care leavers generally;
- Joint planning, joint commissioning and joint delivery;
- Building positive and lasting relationships with young people;
- Supporting those with complex and multiple needs;
- Preparing for independence;
- Reducing and managing the crisis of homelessness;
- Housing supply and affordability.

### **Development of more consistent accommodation and support pathways for care leavers**

A challenge for Wales generally is the lack of consistency in services for care leavers. A starting point for addressing at a local level what is a multi-dimensional problem is to take a systems-based, outcomes focused approach, which places young people at the heart of planning and delivery.

A **'Positive Pathway' model** for preventing youth homelessness has been developed in England<sup>16</sup>. This is a flexible framework for local authorities and their partners to use locally and provides a planned approach to homelessness prevention and housing for young people. It aims to help public service commissioners and providers of services to work together in planning and delivering services for young people recognising that safe, decent and affordable housing underpins achievement of other positive outcomes - whether these relate to education, training, employment, health, or safer communities. It is proven to work just as well in a large rural authority as an urban authority, because the framework is flexible<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> St Basils, a youth homelessness agency in England, developed this in 2012 with other agencies and it has recently been updated. The Department for Communities and Local Government fund St Basils to 'roll out' this model to local authorities in England through 2 youth homelessness advisers. Around 50% of local authorities reported in a Homeless Link survey last year they have a 'pathway' model or are developing one.

<sup>17</sup> Based on the author's work in England with local authorities developing 'Positive Pathway' approaches

Building on this, **Barnardos and St Basils** have, with input and advice from others, developed a specific model and toolkit for care leavers in England. This will be disseminated free of charge to all local authorities and their partners. With input from a range of other agencies, the care leaver national 'accommodation and support' framework covers all aspects of young people's very different journey's from care to independence, highlighting different approaches, considerations and what works well. This is still in draft and due for publication later this year. It covers: Preparation; Joint planning; Managing housing crisis; Accommodation and support options and Move on options.

There is a rich seam of practice and knowledge across Wales that could be shared on a more structured basis. Many Third Sector providers, housing associations and local authorities have ways of working, schemes or programmes that they could show case. A 'call for evidence' requesting examples of what works and recent innovations against a Welsh 'accommodation and support framework' or 'pathway' for care leavers would enable more focussed sharing. Involving young people as experts in this process as well would add a depth of insight for commissioners and providers.

### **Joint planning, joint or co-commissioning and joint delivery**

The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty has expressed her view that more can be done within the Supporting People programme to forge linkages with other Welsh Government programmes, such as Flying Start and Families First<sup>18</sup>.

The long term costs to the public purse of multiple exclusion and poverty for care leavers has been highlighted in various pieces of research (Hannon et al, 2010; Barnardos, 2014b). The major savings through more joint or co-commissioning are most likely to be in health services and the criminal justice system (Battrick, 2014; Bramley et al, 2015). Joint commissioning, or aligning budgets to co-commission and more integrated working is not just a 'nice to have' option but is increasingly a necessity.

Data collection and analysis is a critical element of planning and commissioning. There are areas of existing data collection nationally which could be usefully adjusted to give local commissioners and national policy makers greater insights into care leavers housing and support pathways. These are outlined in the final section of the report.

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<sup>18</sup> Letter from the Minister to Regional Consultative Committees, November 2014

Typically commissioners that will have an interest in long term positive outcomes for this group are: Children's and Adults Social Care, Local Health Boards, Supporting People, Housing, employment and skills commissioners, housing associations, Probation and Community Rehabilitation Companies. Examples of joint working might include:

- Supporting People and Children's Services planning around the 'cliff edge' of the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday for young people living in 'other arrangements'<sup>19</sup>;
- Supporting People and Children's Services jointly planning returns from out of authority placements back to local supported accommodation;
- Employability and skills programmes;
- Low level, proactive mental health support to care leavers via supported accommodation schemes or leaving care services;
- Alternatives to custodial remand accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds;
- Resettlement accommodation and support on release from custody;
- Financial literacy training for prospective tenants.

There are some examples of more flexible cross authority commissioning of services already, with these decisions being driven by the type of provision needed and economies of scale. For example, a Nightstop emergency supported lodgings scheme has been commissioned across local authority boundaries between **Flintshire and Denbighshire**<sup>20</sup> as a safe alternative to unsuitable accommodation such as bed and breakfast.

**Torfaen's Young People's Support Service**<sup>21</sup> is an example of an integrated model of delivery for care leavers and other young people. A range of agencies fund posts and provide services within a 'one stop shop', which includes the leaving care service. Instead of designing services within various funding and professional silos, young people and positive outcomes have been at the heart of service planning. Integrated service delivery followed logically.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Other arrangements' are unregulated placements for looked after 16/17 year olds that are deemed suitable for their needs. These can include supported housing schemes and supported lodgings. Sometimes these placements are purchased by Children's Services outside Supporting People provisions, but they often end on or around the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday due to funding changes when a young person is legally no longer looked after. Joint planning and commissioning could reduce the necessity of moving based on age.

<sup>20</sup> See [http://www.localsolutions.org.uk/projects/homelessness/nightstop\\_service/](http://www.localsolutions.org.uk/projects/homelessness/nightstop_service/)

<sup>21</sup> See an article about TYPSS here: <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/typss-providing-uplifting-service-young-1935818>

**Flintshire's Children's Services and Housing** have developed an integrated service for care leavers and 16 /17 year olds at risk of homelessness. There is a joint budget, a shared database and joint planning around commissioning of supported accommodation<sup>22</sup>.

**Camden**<sup>23</sup> have a well developed accommodation and support pathway, which is a leading example in England of local collaboration between Supporting People, Housing Options, Children's Services, Health and Third Sector Providers. A range of services are in place, from 24 hour services with waking night, security or sleep in staff to visiting support with on call options. Within this are some specialist services (e.g. mental health, young parents, domestic violence, gang associated young people). Young people 'progress' through the Pathway. There are also 'floating' specialists in mental health and substance misuse who will work with any young person living in supported accommodation.

### **Building positive and lasting relationships with young people**

Whilst there are many options for improving services and outcomes, there is one factor which is often overlooked but which young people repeatedly say makes the difference. Brilliantly designed services simply do not work for care leavers if the staff do not have right values, attitudes, knowledge and skills to work with them – and the time to do so. Investing in the importance of the relationship is at the heart of successful services and positive outcomes for care leavers (Action for Children, 2014).

The current model for supporting care leavers means that young people have not usually been able to shape directly the kind of support they need. Personalised approaches as young people get a bit older, such as self-directed support (for example, leading of assessments and some choice of service) and for some, an element of personal budget, could enable care leavers to identify their own needs and make choices about how and when they are supported to live their lives. But they would need access to good information, advocacy and advice so they can make informed decisions. There is no reason why the Personal Adviser role cannot be delegated as long as any conflicts of interest are identified and managed. Young people having some control and choice over their primary support worker (e.g. someone from a leaving care service, a housing support worker, an ex-foster carer) may also help to reduce role confusion and duplication of effort as well as give care leavers more continuity.

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<sup>22</sup> From the PPIW survey 2015. For more information contact Community Support Services Manager  
Katie.clubb@flintshire.gov.uk

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/housing/general-housing-information/supporting-people/pathways/young-peoples-pathway.en>

## **Working with young people with complex and multiple needs**

Housing related support services cannot be a replacement for clinical services but 'psychologically aware' services can purposefully support positive progress during the transition to adulthood for young people with mental health problems, or behavioural and emotional difficulties.

**SOLAS**<sup>24</sup> has developed provision for young people with complex and multiple needs. Alongside all of their services they provide a Psychological Service, which offers support and training to staff. There is a specialist scheme for care leavers with complex and multiple needs, offered as an alternative to foster care or residential care which local authorities can spot purchase.

**The Fair Chance Fund** is a £15 million programme aimed at young people 18 -24 who are in the revolving door of homelessness and facing long term multiple exclusion. The England Government programme pays for housing, employment and educational support for homeless 18 to 24 year olds with social investors putting money in on a long-term payment by results basis<sup>25</sup>. Across England seven schemes are underway and are all different in their models of delivery. An evaluation is underway which will give commissioners insights into what works well for a group that services have often failed to support effectively.

**Housing First** is increasingly recognised as a model to support long term or repeatedly homeless adults with complex and multiple needs. It can also be an option for young people with complex and multiple needs who cannot sustain supported accommodation, such as foyers or hostels. **Ceredigion** cited an example of a young person working with the Youth Offending Service who was living alone in a housing association property with floating support which was working well as a model<sup>26</sup>.

## **Preparing for Independence**

The Children's Commissioner for Wales recommended that Housing Authorities deliver annual training to Children's Services (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2011 & 2013). This would aid further understanding of the realities of the local housing market, housing options,

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<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.solas-cymru.co.uk/our-services/movein-highly-vulnerable-young-peoples-services/>

<sup>25</sup> Payment back to the social investors is only made if the outcomes are achieved. The providers of services do not lose out – the social investor in effect takes the risk. The model of funding, Social Impact Bonds, is new but is seen as a way of attracting new investment to deal with long term complex issues.

<sup>26</sup> PPIW survey 2015

availability of supported accommodation and 'progression' options, as well as the difficulties of living independently as a young tenant, in particular the issue of affordability.

**Peer education** can be a highly effective way of getting messages across to young people leaving care. Many care leavers reflect back on their experiences in research (e.g. Children's Commissioner of Wales, 2011; Barnardos, 2014) and are keen to share their experiences and advice with other young people.

**Llamau** run mediation services which are embedded or aligned with statutory youth homelessness prevention services across nine local authorities in South Wales<sup>27</sup>. Their model of delivery is highly effective and recognised nationally as an example of best practice. The use of skilled mediators to reduce not only family breakdown but risks of foster or residential care placement breakdowns amongst older teenagers is an area to explore further.

Addressing landlord confidence as part of preparation for independence is an area which Housing, Children's Services, voluntary sector partners and housing associations can work on together. Building up evidence of suitability as a young tenant will give care leavers more options. Several local authorities have 'move on' panels, including the **Vale of Glamorgan**. Representatives from Housing, Children's Services and local providers, **Llamau and Gwalia** meet monthly to discuss cases of young people who are put forward as ready for a move into independence. It is no longer assumed social housing will be the destination for young people and through **CanDo lettings (Cadwyn Housing Association)** there is increased access into the private rented sector.

**MyPad** is an award winning accredited programme run by **Newport City Homes**<sup>28</sup> in partnerships with other agencies. Its focus is on prospective social housing tenants aged 16 – 24 but this could be adapted for the private rented sector. The programme covers budgeting, preparing for living independently, cooking skills and legal aspects of being a tenant.

**The Money House** is run by Hyde Housing in the Royal Borough of Greenwich<sup>29</sup>. Care leavers have to attend the 5 days course in order to get additional points for move on into social housing. The focus is on financial literacy, but it is delivered in a highly engaging format within a 'Big Brother' style flat. 96% of young people complete the course and get an AQA

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<sup>27</sup> See Llamau's website: <http://www.llamau.org.uk/family-mediation/>

<sup>28</sup> See their website: <http://www.mypadnewport.co.uk>

<sup>29</sup> See their website: <http://www.hyde-housing.co.uk/hydeplus/themoneyhouse>

accreditation. Young people who attended were 3 times less likely to have arrears of more than £500 than their peers.

A national 'call for evidence' (see above) would highlight many more current examples of innovative and effective practice in preparing young people for independence.

### **Reducing and managing the crisis of homelessness**

There are new opportunities to improve joint planning for care leavers as a result of the changes to the homelessness legislation which outline the need for pro-active help and recognises care leavers as a group at high risk of homelessness.

Personal Housing Plans are not a statutory requirement within the new legislation, although they are recognised as good practice in prevention of homelessness and give a very practical structure to the duty on local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent a person from becoming homeless. The pathway planning process for care leavers<sup>30</sup> is statutory but currently there is a variable level of involvement in this process from Housing Authorities.

A bespoke care leaver 'Personal Housing Plan' devised to sit within or be aligned to the pathway plan would be an new opportunity to look at young people's housing options and associated considerations on choice, location, type, affordability and longer term aspirations. This would come before the development of a Personal Housing Plan as part of the 56 day duty to prevent or relieve homelessness. This would not necessarily mean a Housing Officer attending all pathway plan review meetings, which would be resource intensive. But it would ensure some level of Housing involvement in every care leaver's Pathway Plan, however 'light touch' from Housing Authorities. A contingency plan could be a core feature of such a Plan.

Housing and Children's Services may be considering reviewing and updating their joint protocols as a result of the new homelessness legislation. The written working agreements could pick up on a range of areas such as prevention of homelessness, securing safe short-stay accommodation and working together on addressing housing options and affordability for care leavers.

The extent of use of bed and breakfast as an option for homeless care leavers is not fully understood currently. There is limited formal reporting beyond the annual Children's Services

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<sup>30</sup> There is a statutory duty to prepare and regularly review a pathway plan for each young person who is eligible for leaving care services under the provisions of the Children ( Leaving Care) Act 2000 aged 16 – 21 ( or up to 25 for those in further education or training). The Plan should cover every element of the young persons life, including housing/accommodation plans.

return on 19 year olds<sup>31</sup>. Learning from those authorities that do not use bed and breakfast will assist those that are still routinely using bed and breakfast. For example, **Cardiff Housing Authority** reported it had not placed a young person into bed and breakfast for eight years. **Ceredigion Housing Authority** had not done so at all last year<sup>32</sup>.

The use of bed and breakfast by Housing Authorities for 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless reduced significantly in England from a starting point of around 1,000 at any one time in 2006/07 to the current position of around 60 in bed and breakfast at any one time. Statutory reporting quarterly and provision of specialist advice to local authorities helped to make positive changes around prevention and provision of safe, suitable short stay accommodation.

### **Housing Supply and Affordability**

There are no easy or quick local solutions that can address the barriers of housing supply and affordability, particularly for young people. Delaying living alone until they can afford their own accommodation is the most obvious option for many young people, including care leavers. Some local authorities have indicated that they are considering re-commissioning Supporting People provision so there are more smaller shared houses, as 'step down' options for young people.

**Llammau** have recently started leasing properties from private landlords in the Vale of Glamorgan for young people to move into from higher cost supported housing schemes. Young people share properties, which enables them to more readily get into employment or training than if they were living in the higher cost supported schemes.

**Crisis** had some funding from the English Government to run a 'Sharing Solutions' programme, to learn more about different sharing models<sup>33</sup>. Housing organisations piloted different ways of sharing. An evaluation and toolkit were published in March 2015, providing insights into what makes sharing work – or not.

**Lead tenants or peer landlords** can work well for shared living where young people's needs are assessed as low. This involves giving one member of the household additional responsibility around housing management. Their role is rewarded or incentivised in some

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<sup>31</sup> StatsWales data on the accommodation type for 19 year olds care leavers – the OC3 return

<sup>32</sup> PPIW survey returns 2015

<sup>33</sup> See Crisis website: [http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private\\_Rented\\_Sector/Sharing\\_Solutions/Sharers\\_Toolkit\\_web.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/Sharing_Solutions/Sharers_Toolkit_web.pdf)

way, such as a reduced rent or help with saving. In addition to some learning the Crisis pilots (see above), **Catch -22 and Commonweal**<sup>34</sup> are piloting a scheme for young people.

Shared social housing could be an option in some areas. **SnugBug House Share** is run by St Vincent's Housing Association in Manchester<sup>35</sup> and provides shared housing to any 18 – 24 year old with a local connection. Young people have to attend pre-tenancy training and an interview. There is no support attached to the accommodation, although additional housing management is provided through a 24 hour 'ranger' service. Rents are affordable to young people on low incomes.

Beyond understanding local constraints, there is limited strategic understanding about the ability of young people on low incomes, including care leavers, to access and maintain tenancies (Consumer Focus Wales, 2011). Local Housing Market Assessments could look at age and occupation in relation to local rents and house prices within any affordability modelling and feed this into housing strategies. This sort of information could support local authorities to plan for different housing options. It can also feed into 'reality checks' in preparation work with care leavers and the professionals who support them.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The report highlights a rising number of care leavers across Wales, concerns about the increased levels of complex and multiple needs, pressure on public sector budgets, including the Supporting People programme and the reduced supply of affordable housing for young people. Care leavers, perhaps more so than ever, are at high risk of housing instability and homelessness in Wales.

Across Wales the provision for care leavers varies considerably. Some local authorities have well developed joint working or integrated service delivery models and a range of accommodation options with support, in recognition that 'one size does not fit all'. Others are less developed. The differences are not simply explained by geography, population and socio-economic factors.

The 'When I Am Ready' scheme will support some care leavers to stay with ex-foster carers beyond the age of 18. Many local authorities already have such schemes in place. For some young people this will not be an option.

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<sup>34</sup> See Commonweal's website: <http://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk/our-projects/peer-landlord-london>

<sup>35</sup> See SnugBug House Share website: <http://www.snugbughouseshare.co.uk>

There is a universal gap in provision for care leavers with complex and multiple needs, although this is felt more acutely in some areas than others. The support needs of this group often exceed what is available through the local Supporting People provision. They are highly vulnerable and most likely to end up in inappropriate, unsuitable housing situations.

There are other gaps in services, including emergency/short stay options in some areas. Some local authorities have not used bed and breakfast and found different ways to accommodate young people in crisis. Many do so as a last resort but some are using bed and breakfast more routinely due to a lack of other options.

The challenge of affordability will hit young people on low incomes the hardest as rents continue to rise and benefit levels remain relatively static. Care leavers are over twice as likely as their peers to be 'NEET'. Landlord confidence in young people as tenants is weak, across both the social and private sector. Being economically active, financially literate and being able to sustain settled accommodation are intrinsically linked.

Some care leavers are failing in tenancies because they are too young and inexperienced to sustain their accommodation. For most, their expectations of living independently are not matched by the reality of managing their own home. Progressing through supported accommodation and taking smaller steps to independence can help to prepare young people for managing their own tenancy.

The new homelessness legislation will help to prevent homelessness amongst care leavers. There are opportunities to work earlier with care leavers on planning housing options through developing bespoke Personal Housing Plans to align with Pathway Planning processes.

There are numerous examples of innovation and good practice across Wales and beyond. Sharing of what works well is a key factor in service improvement. Planning improvements with young people at the heart of the process, and learning from them about what makes a difference, will help commissioners to invest more effectively.

Finally, care leavers repeatedly describe the life-changing importance of support from a trusted adult. This is the starting point for many care leaver's successful transitions to adulthood. Keeping this at the forefront of commissioning decisions will support care leavers achieving the outcomes that they and their corporate parents aspire to.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Reducing variation of provision and supporting joint planning of services**

- 1.1 Support the development of a national care leaver 'accommodation and support' framework and toolkit for local authorities and their partners. NB a model has been developed in England led by Barnardos and it may be possible to develop a Welsh version of this relatively easily and at minimal cost.
- 1.2 Encourage sharing of innovation and what works well across Children's Services, Housing, the Third Sector and housing associations through asking for evidence and sponsoring some events. These could be organised against different elements of a national care leaver accommodation and support framework, for example: commissioning of short stay accommodation, preparing young people for leaving care, affordable move on options.
- 1.3 Improve national and local data sets to better understand care leaver's accommodation and homelessness:
  - Revise the Health and Social Care OC3 data set on 'suitable accommodation for care leavers aged 19' to enable better analysis of accommodation options. Extend this reporting to include 20 and 21 year olds. Consider extending the age of reporting for the Employment, Education and Training care leaver data set to mirror this.
  - Separate out statutory homelessness acceptances by Priority Need in WHO 12 data sets so 18 – 20 year old care leaver acceptances can be identified separately from other vulnerable young people.

### **2. Improving accommodation and support arrangements**

- 2.1 Consider some cross Government innovation funding to encourage local joint or co-commissioning of services to prevent homelessness amongst care leavers. Involvement of other commissioners beyond Children's Services, Housing and Supporting People, as well as young people could be a pre-requisite for applying.
  - Funding could assist local areas in bringing together commissioners to create local business cases for funding based on local needs and service analysis,

service re-design, cost benefit analysis and shared outcomes frameworks. These could be within a single authority or be across authorities.

- Consider establishing a short term national funding programme for local and/or regional commissioning groups and provider organisations to bid into together as partners, which pilots new models of supporting care leavers with complex and multiple needs who are not able to sustain living in current supported accommodation or manage a tenancy.
- If there is interest within Government to explore social investment, ask local areas to consider this as an option in any instances of service redesign for those with complex and multiple needs.

### **3. Improving joint planning and preparation**

3.1 Issue short joint guidance to both Housing and Children's Services to align joint protocols with new housing legislation and Pathway Planning, with a suggested template that also covers:

- preparing young people for leaving care in relation to housing options and affordability.
- specific arrangements for groups of young people, e.g. young parents, young people coming out of custody, those coming back from out of authority placements, asylum seeking young people, university students, young people with disabilities receiving services from Adult Social Care.
- joint work to avoid housing crisis and agreements over use of emergency accommodation.
- pre-tenancy training and move on processes.
- allocation of social housing and access to rent deposit or bond schemes.
- annual training/briefings for Children's Services staff on housing.

### **4. Protecting and supporting the most vulnerable care leavers**

4.1 Change statutory guidance to require Directors of Social Services to sign off decisions for any young person accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 to leave care aged 16/17.

4.2 Consider making illegal the placement of young people aged 16/17 and care leavers into bed and breakfast accommodation. NB: any impact assessment of this would need

to look at any unintended consequences and mitigate against these e.g. young people being placed in unsuitable night shelters and mixed adult provision.

4.3 Require quarterly reporting on the use of all bed and breakfast accommodation by both Housing and Children's Services, including length of stay e.g. under 6 weeks and over 6 weeks.

- Housing to report on: placements into bed and breakfast of any homeless 16 or 17 year olds and of any care leavers aged 18 – 20.
- Children's Services to report on: any 16 and 17 year olds placed under Section 17 as children in need; any looked after 16 and 17 year olds and any care leavers aged 16 – 21.

4.4 Request information from local authorities through a short questionnaire on their short stay/emergency accommodation options for care leavers and other vulnerable young people. Consider asking for progress updates from those where bed and breakfast is used regularly or for particular groups (e.g. young people coming out of custody).

4.5 Extend the statutory homelessness safety net for vulnerable care leavers aged 21 - 24: in assessing priority need and vulnerability, extend the age of automatic priority need to 21 – 24 year olds who are or have been care leavers under the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. If a decision to consider 21-24 year old care leavers as automatically in priority need is rejected, local authorities should specifically be required to take into account whether any person 21 - 24 who is or has been eligible for services under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 is vulnerable and the Statutory Code of Guidance strengthened to encourage positive decisions.

## **5. Supply and affordability**

5.1 Commission a small number of independent housing affordability assessments for young people on low incomes to inform planning of housing options in the future for care leavers and other vulnerable groups of young people.

5.2 Engage with social landlords regarding their offer to young people leaving care through communicating 'what works', for example:

- the positive business impact of financial literacy/pre-tenancy programmes for care leavers (e.g. MyPad and The Money House).
- Models of sharing social housing as a progression on from supported accommodation.

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