

HSHAWB 34 Action for Children - Wales

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Llywodraeth Leol a Thai | Local Government and Housing Committee

Bil Digartrefedd a Dyrannu Tai Cymdeithasol (Cymru) | Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan: Action for Children - Wales | Evidence from: Action for Children - Wales

What are your views on the general principles of the Bill, and whether there is a need for legislation to deliver the stated policy intention?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

We believe that there is a need for legislation in order to deliver additional support to care experienced young people who are leaving care, as well as clearer duties on public bodies of their responsibilities and to provide priority to those young people.

Our experience is that within Wales – and at times within local authorities – there is a postcode lottery of support and allocation of housing for care experienced young people. There have been examples where we have been engaged in offering support to young people but have not been asked to be involved in planning their next steps – both when we are supporting them in our own residential and fostering services, and when we are engaged in providing other specialist support.

In some situations where we have been supporting young people in specialist residential placements where they have recognised and diagnosed Additional Learning Needs, we still see that they do not receive the right support

.In one example the young person had trauma linked to his early years and was all fully documented in his care plans. Unfortunately, he was informed at 17 that when he turned 18, he would no longer be able to access support from Adult Services, which naturally had a real impact on his functioning and impacted on his exams. He was simply handed back to the Leaving Care Team and allocated a Personal Assistant, but unfortunately the support was not significant enough to

meet his needs. Our staff had to heavily invest in supporting him to identify accommodation, research access to welfare support and prepare him to live independently. We know the impact that added trauma from not receiving the right support, at the right time, has on children and young people and how that knocks on in wider society. More intense, specialist support is often required, putting further pressures on services.

We believe that in order to make progress on dealing with the “postcode lottery” and to guarantee support to those who need it most, we need to ensure that there is recognition of the duty to ensure that care experienced young people should be supported into suitable accommodation. This is further enhanced by the need for each local authority to develop a protocol for handling cases involving care leavers, however we would also want to ensure that there is monitoring of compliance with these duties.

Our experiences in multiple local authorities across Wales does paint a varied picture of support for young people leaving care, but sadly more often than not these are negative experiences for young people and our staff.

What are your views on the provisions set out in Part 1 of the Bill - Homelessness (sections 1 -34)? In particular, are the provisions workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

Section 23

The focus of this section on ensuring that transition plans are considered well in advance of a young person turning 18, with the intention of ensuring that no care experienced young person has to present as homeless on their birthday is welcome.

Unfortunately, young people we work with have had to be supported to present as homeless on their 18th birthdays, despite advocating for planning a transition in advance.

The added provision of prioritising care leavers for allocation of social housing is also welcome.

We appreciate the Welsh Government’s intention to set out requirements for the suitability of accommodation for care leavers, including location, standard and

provider. We would ask that when setting out these requirements they are co-produced by care experienced young people and allow young person's involvement in exploring their own requirements through local protocols.

It is vitally important that any young person feels involved and part of their next steps planning, particularly those who are care experienced. Unfortunately, some of the young people we have worked with have had negative experiences where their wishes have not been respected and heard.

One example is a young person being pushed into supported lodgings at the age of 19 who felt they deserved more freedom to live independently and move away from the typical "house rules" they had been exposed to after years of living in residential children's homes. With no resolution found the young person chose instead to present as homeless which resulted in them temporarily living in a hotel whilst different accommodation was sourced.

Section 24

We welcome the Welsh Government's move to introduce local protocols for handling cases where a care experienced young person is involved and is at risk of becoming homeless. However, we would like to see more explicit guidance from Welsh Government that the protocol should adopt a multi-agency approach in the cases of care leavers at risk of homelessness.

Whilst the statutory duties should be shared between social services and the local housing authority, it should not be overlooked that the not-for-profit and charitable sector have a role to play in supporting care experienced young people.

We are also concerned that as things stand we see social workers 'fire-fighting' and unable to constructively engage in the existing processes which are in place to ensure full transition planning. It can at times be seen as there being alternative support available at 18 and another team can "pick up the support".

The lack of social housing provision – supported living, independent living, training tenancies etc – is currently insufficient and the changes in the Bill do not necessarily improve this. This could mean things remain as they are unless we see real change and improvement in the levels of provision becoming available.

Section 25 (1D) makes explicit reference to the voluntary sector and we would wish to see this replicated in Section 24.

What are your views on the provisions set out in Part 2 of the Bill – Social Housing Allocation (sections 35 – 38)? In particular, are the provisions workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

Section 37

Again we welcome the intention of the legislation to ensure that care experienced young people are a “preference group” to avoid homelessness and to encourage transition planning ahead of 18th birthdays or “when I’m ready” decisions.

However we do have concerns that the delivery of these intentions will be complicated by the limited amount of housing stock, particularly in terms of transition from residential care to independent living. Care experienced young people – like others included in this Bill – require multi-agency, specialist support, and with widespread challenges in the public and third sector we feel this could hamper the delivery of these provisions.

What are your views on the provisions set out in Part 3 of the Bill – Social Housing Allocation (sections 39 – 43 and Schedule 1)? In particular, are the provisions workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

What are the potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill’s provisions and how does the Bill take account of them?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

How appropriate are the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation, as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the Explanatory Memorandum)?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

Are there any unintended consequences likely to arise from the Bill?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

What are your views on the Welsh Government's assessment of the financial implications of the Bill, as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

Are there any other issues you would like to raise about the Bill and the Explanatory Memorandum or any related matters?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

Children and Young People;Education ;Communities ;Equality and Human Rights;Health and Care Services;Justice;Social Care
