



November 2019

End Youth Evictions: stopping the cycle of youth homelessness in Wales

Our Vision

Everyone in Wales should have a decent and affordable home: it is the foundation for the health and well-being of people and communities.

Mission

Shelter Cymru's mission is to improve people's lives through our advice and support services and through training, education and information work. Through our policy, research, campaigning and lobbying, we will help overcome the barriers that stand in the way of people in Wales having a decent affordable home.

Values

- Be independent and not compromised in any aspect of our work with people in housing need.
- Work as equals with people in housing need, respect their needs and help them to take control of their lives.
- Constructively challenge to ensure people are properly assisted and to improve good practice.

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Introduction

There is a growing ambition within Welsh social housing to achieve zero evictions into homelessness. This report considers what it will take to end evictions for a group of people who are especially vulnerable to the impacts of homelessness: young people.

Last year more than 3,000 young people¹ in Wales became homeless and had to use council homelessness services², while many more became ‘hidden’ homeless, living on sofas and friends’ floors. Eviction from social and supported housing was a significant contributor to youth homelessness.

We spoke with young people who had experienced eviction and the threat of eviction. We also spoke with local authority homelessness practitioners and with professionals working with young people in social and supported housing in both strategic and operational roles³.

‘If you’re working in a hostel with young kids the majority of us have problems, we either have mental problems, physical problems or actual life problems. We are not in the best places in our lives at the moment. You’re sitting there, blaming us, having a go at us, ain’t going to make things better. We need someone who’s going to sit there, support us, and try and find a solution. And not just threaten to kick us out pretty much’

Young person

As well as looking at the experiences of young people, this report explores areas of good practice and includes ideas and solutions from people working with young people and from young people themselves. Together with a number of other recent pieces of work carried out in Wales⁴, this report describes the need for urgent change in the youth homelessness system: a system that is meant to end homelessness, but all too often ends up perpetuating it.

1 Young people aged 16 to 24

2 Source: Welsh Government homelessness statistics, 2018/19 available at <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/Statutory-Homelessness-Prevention-and-Relief/householdsforwhichassistancehasbeenprovided-by-outcome-age-gender>

3 The sample comprised 11 local authority respondents accounting for half of Welsh authorities, and 10 professional stakeholders representing a range of agencies across Wales. We also carried out in-depth interviews with seven young people who had experienced eviction and/or the threat of eviction from social and/or supported housing.

4 See ‘Further Reading’ at Appendix 3

How big an issue is this?

We know anecdotally that youth evictions into homelessness are an issue; however, there is little data to evidence the true scale of the problem.

'Evictions are occurring both in social and supported housing, partly as a result of cuts. Staff are less able to spend time with people, and some organisations are becoming more focused on cash flow, hence evicting more quickly. Attitudes are hardening as funding gets tighter.'

Stakeholder

To find out the scale of youth evictions into homelessness, we submitted Freedom of Information requests to each of the Welsh local authorities, seeking to obtain data showing the number of young people who had become homeless due to an eviction or a temporary exclusion from social and supported accommodation. From the responses we received it is clear that this data is not being recorded in a consistent manner across Wales.

'Yes, there is an increasing issue with youth homelessness anecdotally. We have not had previous data to compare. Awareness is much greater now and so it is likely homeless presentations have increased or will.'

(Local authority stakeholder)

If it is not being recorded then it is not being monitored, and if it is not being monitored then we cannot know how many young people are being evicted or excluded and becoming homeless as a result. If we do not understand the problem then we cannot hope to understand how to solve it.

'We assist them to make a homeless assessment which is pointless as they're often found intentionally homeless. Usually they just go into B&B or sofa surf. Just because someone is evicted from our supported accommodation doesn't mean that we blacklist them, we work really hard to try and assist that young person and secure other accommodation. Other services often do refuse to work with them.'

Stakeholder

Stakeholders were keen to stress that eviction is always a last resort and that the decision is never taken lightly. In comparison some young people told us that the threat of eviction was used frequently and inconsistently. They found this difficult and destabilising.

***'I was evicted ...
Pretty much every
single day even if
we shouted a bit
too loud we would
be threatened
with eviction. We
would get told we
have 24 hours,
we would keep
getting threatened
with the 24 hour
notice.'***

Young person

'Our jobs have changed to keeping people in their homes rather than eviction or enforcement. That applies to young people too. As a business we have recognised it's more cost effective to sustain tenancies than to evict.'

Stakeholder

Local authority homelessness practitioners felt that youth homelessness is increasing and that the complexity of young people's support needs is also increasing. More than half felt that supported accommodation was the source of most youth evictions.

'There is most certainly an increase in the complex cases of youth homelessness and the issues coming with the young people.'

Stakeholder

'Youth homelessness appears to show an upward trend – with many examples of hidden homelessness exhibiting as sofa-surfing.'

Local authority stakeholder

How are young people being evicted?

There are a range of different tenancy and licence agreements that a young person may hold. Each of these can be ended in a different way. Exclusion orders, section 21 'no-fault' eviction notices and 28-day notices to quit are most commonly used, with notice periods varying between two months and immediate effect.

Young people's protection from eviction varies depending whether they have a licence (as many do) or one of the various types of tenancy. See Appendix 1 for a full description of how these rights differ.

The ability for young people to be excluded or evicted without the landlord having to give a reason is incredibly de-stabilising. None of the current routes for possession include a requirement to secure alternative accommodation.

The potential to lose their homes in such a short space of time and for a whole host of reasons makes young people feel stressed, worried and unsettled. Having a stable foundation and security is essential for people to be able to plan, prepare and work towards future aspirations and aims.

'I do get a bit scared when they threaten to kick me out and it just adds more stress.'

Young person

We heard of one local authority giving young people a ‘training tenancy’, a trend that has also emerged in Shelter Cymru casework. A ‘training tenancy’ is not a legal form of tenancy and provides a young person no rights or protection. However, if a local authority is trying to evict someone who has been issued a training tenancy they can easily be challenged and the eviction suspended – if the young person is able to get legal assistance. Shelter Cymru has successfully challenged several evictions in this way, but we heard from young people that ‘training tenancies’ are still being issued.

‘There was only four of us who lived there and we were all threatened with eviction within, what, the first week or two of living there.’

Young person

In supported accommodation, temporary exclusion orders are given that come into immediate effect and are for a specific period of time, often 48 hours. Stakeholders stated that exclusion from supported accommodation usually happens where there is deemed to be risk posed to other residents or staff. Some said though that they usually don’t know where the young person goes during the exclusion period.

Data from one of the local authorities that responded to our FOI showed that all of the young people temporarily excluded from supported accommodation either sofa surfed, presented as homeless to the local authority or slept rough as a result.

‘Well they say you have so many number of warnings and then you get a notice but I’ve seen so many people have warning after warning after warning and no notice given and then other times someone is given a notice immediately but they don’t work to make it better.’

Young person

As discussed, young people described being frequently verbally threatened with eviction for a range of misdemeanours. These included being too noisy, arguing, and failing to pay their service charge. These are not recorded and were felt to often be used inconsistently and unfairly.

‘I was the first one evicted; it was a new project, it had literally just started about two or three weeks before I moved in there. Someone who moved in before I did was on his final warning before I even moved in, he’s now on the verge of being evicted, I’ve been evicted, someone else has been threatened with eviction and so’s the other person.’

Young person

‘Yeah, I’ve been threatened with eviction. Not fully kicked out but maybe have to be transferred because I got caught with a bottle of Stella, had a cheeky little drink you know. But to be fair that was completely my own fault... It’s only fair at the end of the day I broke the rule and it was explained clearly.’

Young person

Threats of eviction were described as having a negative impact on wellbeing and feelings of safety and security. Young people felt that they were constantly reminded that the accommodation was not their home. The threat of eviction for arrears was felt to be particularly unfair as many of the young people we spoke with were struggling to access welfare and to manage their finances.

'To be honest with the eviction notices I don't think they should do them, at the end of the day if you're struggling with money, you're struggling with money. They can't just expect you to get money like that, it doesn't grow on trees.'

Young person

'They've completely banned guests and stuff now and the residents feel like crap there, like complete crap, and they're still getting threatened with eviction, like they still do it, and it's just not nice.'

Young person

What is the impact of eviction on young people?

The emotional and psychological impacts of being evicted included feelings of failure, rejection and distrust in professionals. Many young people reported feeling stressed and worried about where they would go and whether they would become homeless.

'It's just re-traumatising, same with any eviction but particularly with young people they tend to shut down and don't want to access services or work with any support providers for those needs. It puts a barrier up for getting help, damages trust and it takes a long time to repair that damage and build a rapport.'

Stakeholder

Eviction often resulted in young people being placed into unsafe situations such as sleeping rough, sofa surfing or accessing inappropriate emergency accommodation. Local authority practitioners said that following eviction young people were likely to sofa surf or stay with relatives; a third of local authority practitioners felt that young people were likely to sleep rough as a result.

'I've been homeless before, I've slept on the streets, I've done sofa surfing before and it's not a good feeling, it's not a nice feeling to have because of the uncertainty of where you're going to stay or whether you're safe. Like, on the streets you don't sleep because you know for a fact if one drunk person sees you chances are you're going to get your head kicked in. That's not a good feeling. So yeah that scares me... that threat of eviction kept putting me back in that mindset of "Shit, what if I do? What if I do end up back on the streets?"'

Young person

One young person described sleeping rough for a few weeks after losing their place in supported accommodation, not through any fault of their own but due to no longer meeting the criteria.

'Getting the eviction notice though just made me want to leave and be on my own.'

Young person

Local authority practitioners highlighted the likelihood of safeguarding issues following an eviction, such as substance misuse, sexual exploitation and cuckooing. Going to live in insecure, unsafe and precarious housing situations may expose young people to exploitation and abuse on a number of levels.

'Lack of stable accommodation can lead young people to be in danger of financial and/or sexual exploitation. There are other dangers such as forced into prostitution and/or modern slavery. Where a young person has suffered abuse at home, they could be forced to return to that situation if they cannot access suitable housing.'

Stakeholder

Local authorities felt that homeless young people were likely to experience loneliness and social isolation; long-term effects might include pregnancy, domestic abuse and unhealthy relationships, and disengagement from education and work.

'Short term – lack of suitable housing, risk of exploitation mixing with other homeless client groups, low self-esteem. Long term – debt, unhealthy relationships, mental health issues, substance/alcohol misuse, missed education /employment opportunities'

Local authority stakeholder

There were concerns that failed tenancies and long or repeated periods of homelessness were likely to impact upon the young person's choice of future housing as a result of their tenancy history. This was due partly to social landlord restrictions on allocating to people with former tenancy arrears, but was also due to the way that providers assess risk, meaning that any instances of eviction would be counted against the young person for years into the future. Practitioners pointed out that this could lead to young people becoming trapped in the wider homelessness system and excluded from the housing that best suits their needs, building a long-term distrust of services.

'No support, lack of income, not being able or ready to manage a tenancy, restrictions being placed on them for any future housing.'

Local authority stakeholder

There were felt to be impacts to the wider community as a result of young people being evicted into homelessness. This was closely linked to the level of exploitation and risk that the young person would be exposed to, along with wider anti-social behaviour issues which could lead to members of the community feeling intimidated or unsafe. There would be likely to be additional costs for other services such as the police, health, social services and homelessness services.

‘Services dealing with these scenarios can have staff retention issues due to “burnout” or exhaustion due to the draining effect of dealing with these issues on a daily basis. Research confirms the high levels of tenancy failure with this client group and the demands of many services are increased when the continuous circle of homelessness occurs.’

Local authority stakeholder

One local authority practitioner suggested that young people who experience homelessness may end up placing other young people’s tenancies at risk.

‘Impact on friends as they may be sofa surfing and therefore, jeopardising other’s tenancies by sleeping at other people’s tenancies. Increased anti-social behaviour if residing with multiple people, pressuring police and housing officers at RSLs.’

Local authority stakeholder

Although costs for social services and homelessness services particularly stood out, it was felt that the costs impacted on all services that may come into contact with that young person in the future. This was due to the amount of work that would have to take place in order to try to rebuild trust between professionals and the young person. In effect, it would make it harder for everyone else to be able to assist and play their role in supporting the young person.

Research shows that the earlier a person becomes homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will face repeated episodes of homelessness throughout their lives.⁵ People are more likely to have multiple support needs if they have faced several homelessness experiences.

Sian’s story

Sian was brought up in care and was placed into supported accommodation at the age of 17. She struggled to fit in and make friends and was bullied by other residents. One day she had an altercation with another resident and as a result was issued with a 28-day eviction notice. She and her social worker struggled to find another project that was able to accommodate her. Sian felt so let down and rejected that she felt pushed to live independently. She ended up taking the decision to privately rent a flat without support in place. She was very isolated and the flat was in poor condition: *‘In hindsight it wasn’t the right move. The flat had damp, mould, condensation and there was a hole in the roof. When we had the “beast from the east” I literally had snow coming through my roof.’*

The risk of an intentional homelessness decision following an eviction was raised by some stakeholders. They shared multiple examples of young people with additional vulnerabilities being deemed to be intentionally homeless due to the breakdown of their placement in supported or social housing. As a result, young people were sleeping rough, living in

5 Mackie, P & Thomas, I (2014) Nations Apart: Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain. Cardiff University: Crisis

inappropriate and unsuitable accommodation and were unable to get assistance and help to find a home.

David was 18 and living in supported accommodation. He was offered labouring work and despite the staff pleading with him not to take it he did. As a result he could no longer afford the rent in his supported accommodation, so he moved into housing that came with his job. However, within two weeks the work had ended and he presented to the local authority as homeless. He was told that as he had chosen to leave the supported accommodation he was intentionally homeless. As a result he ended up living in a tent.

In 2018/19, just under a fifth (18 per cent) of intentionality decisions made by councils were for young people aged 16-25.

More recently the practice of finding young people aged under 21 intentionally homeless has been effectively ended by the commencement of section 75(3) of the Housing (Wales) Act, on 2 December 2019. However, intentionality decisions may still be made against young people aged over 21, or young people who are deemed to have 'intentionally' caused their homelessness a second time within a five-year period.

Why are young people being evicted?

'Some of these young people have no one, and distrust those that have been involved in their lives e.g. social workers, foster carers. They are still young people who may still have a lot of challenges in their lives, are dealing with one of the most traumatic issues in life – being homeless – and are expected to comply with all the rules thrown at them'

Local authority stakeholder

We spoke with stakeholders, local authority homelessness practitioners, and young people about the reasons for eviction. We heard that while eviction was most often threatened for rent or service charge arrears, it was most often carried out for anti-social behaviour, criminal behaviour and non-engagement.

There were however, a number of underlying factors which were seen as being at the root of most evictions and threats of eviction. This section of the report will discuss these issues in more detail.

'Some young people really shouldn't have come in here, they didn't need to, but once they're in this environment their well-being deteriorates and they then need support.'

Inappropriate placements

A common theme was that young people are often not placed in the type of accommodation most suited to their needs, due to a widespread lack of accommodation options for young people across Wales.⁶

'We need to stop making out like young people have chosen this accommodation, they haven't, it's just all that is on offer. Some young people really shouldn't have come in here, they didn't need to, but once they're in this environment their well-being deteriorates and they then need support. We almost make them need services. If they were able to live independently with floating support they would probably be fine but there are no options for them.'

Support worker

We found that a severe lack of housing with rent levels that young people can afford has meant that supported accommodation is often the default route into housing, whether or not young people need a high level of residential support. Difficulties with partnership working between local authority children's services and housing services were also cited as leading to young people being placed in accommodation that wasn't quite right for them. This was recognised as being a cause of problems that emerge later on which may result in an eviction or a threat of eviction.

'Care leavers are routinely referred to supported accommodation as default on turning 18. It's not a choice, it's just the only option.'

Stakeholder

'A lack of communication between social services and housing departments for those aged 16-17. There is a lack of forward thinking from some who 'bide their time' with the client then expect homelessness teams to pick up the client on their 18th birthday. This can result in clients being placed in temporary accommodation that could be considered a "backwards" step, lead to behavioural issues that can affect duties owed as the client is quite rightly upset with the situation. Broken promises, as the reality of the housing situation is not what has been portrayed and the client then distrusts us.'

Local authority stakeholder

There were also concerns that allocation processes weren't person-centred enough and that this was resulting in young people being 'set up to fail' by being placed with people and environments that they would struggle with.

'It is absolutely about making sure the environment is right for the person, knowing their issues/risk, how does that fit with others in the project etc. You have to understand the issues around the young person to see the potential dynamics. Sometimes we have to say no because of this, can't have a project of too many people with drug issues.'

Stakeholder

⁶ On the lack of accommodation options, see for example House of Lords Library Note LLN 2016/056 (27 October 2016) Impact of the Shortage of Housing on Young People. Available at <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2016-0056/LLN-2016-0056.pdf>

'It ain't better than being at home or having your own place, it ain't better for your head. It messes with your head and you just don't feel the same anymore because when you're in your parent's house they know to leave you alone and if you want them you can go downstairs and speak to them. In here they bother you all the time, knocking your door, or coming in three in the morning pissed and whack your door thinking it's their door so you're constantly on alert.'

Young person

There were clear issues around some of the accommodation that young people were being placed in to and the impact it had on their feelings of safety. This was particularly evident in larger scale projects with lower support-to-resident ratios and wider age ranges of residents.

'There were literally armed police there nearly every night. It was not much better than this one now. There were fights, and even a couple of boys suspected of murder. They'd just been released from prison. I got physically attacked there a couple of times too. They (staff) did nothing.'

Young person

'Even now I don't feel safe. My support worker has said that hostels aren't really the right type of housing for me. In some ways I suppose they can be good but it's not always a good thing. I'm always too nice to people. Growing up in care I learned to keep myself to myself but that really doesn't work in a hostel environment.'

Young person

Evan's story

Evan was 18 and became homeless after losing his private tenancy. He presented to the local authority as homeless and was placed into a hostel. He found the hostel an intimidating place to be and was living with adults of all ages. Many of the residents were suffering with poor mental health and addictions and were visibly using substances in the vicinity of the hostel. Evan felt his own mental health deteriorating as a result and requested to be transferred. He waited a number of days, and out of frustration and due to his poor mental health he seriously self-harmed. He was eventually moved into a hostel for young people where he is coping well and beginning to recover.

Ben's story

Ben was living in supported accommodation that had a good understanding of his needs and history. With little notice Ben was offered a space in a social services-commissioned project. Social services didn't ask for Ben's risk assessment or speak with the supported accommodation providers, and placed him somewhere that wasn't appropriate due to the other residents. Ben has now been evicted and is facing an assault charge. He has been found intentionally homeless and is unable to get any help. This could have all been prevented but social services didn't consider his history and the information other partners had about him.

What can we do?

'We wish there were more shared options out there, it aids employment and training etc. Some people don't need the intensive support. Likewise, sometimes young people are pushed into their own flat even though we know they are going to fail, usually due to affordability, anti-social behaviour and loneliness. Shared is a really good balance.'

Stakeholder

There is a clear need to reassess what is currently on offer and how that meets the needs of young people. Some young people would clearly do better living independently with floating support, but currently too many are being pushed into supported accommodation because that is the only available option.

It is essential that accommodation which is intended to build independence and support young people to live full lives is able to do just that. This will need the cooperation of social housing providers, local authority housing departments and commissioners and providers of supported accommodation.

'Young people tell us they want their own accommodation, usually in social housing, but obviously there's a lack of social housing. We have a PRS scheme but affordability is the issue. Under-25s are not exempt from the shared room rate at all.'

Stakeholder

'Supported accommodation has become default and not always suitable. I personally think there should be more and different options, it shouldn't be the way it is now and just one route or option in. It should be dependent on the person and I know that is difficult to commission but it should be on the individual.'

Stakeholder

Good practice

One housing association in south Wales established a shared accommodation project for five young people. All of the young people were on route to being referred into supported accommodation but were diverted into the shared house. The rent was set at an affordable level and included all bills, so that the young people could afford their rent while going into employment. The property was managed by a housing officer that took a person-centred approach and dealt with any issues in a restorative way. Each of the young people was able to make steps towards employment or education and all maintained their tenancy for a year before four of the five moved on into independent living. Unfortunately the project was decommissioned due to a perceived lack of demand. Considering recent evidence about the increase in young people experiencing homelessness, it is likely that the lack of demand was due to the referral pathway not functioning effectively.

Affordability and poverty

‘Having to tell a young person not to get a job because they won’t be able to afford their accommodation is common. We are trapping people in services despite being funded to build independence, it is so wrong. They are here all day with nothing to do, often with only one or two support workers who are not able to spend quality time with them and then we wonder why they are behaving in a challenging way or finding other risky things to do.’

Support worker

High rents and service charges in supported accommodation were cited as a significant problem as they prevent young people accessing paid employment. Both stakeholders and young people explained that if they got a job and had to contribute towards their rent it was incredibly difficult and was too expensive.

‘They are here all day with nothing to do, often with only one or two support workers who are not able to spend quality time with them and then we wonder why they are behaving in a challenging way or finding other risky things to do.’

Support worker

‘Every staff member in supported accommodation has had a conversation where they have told a young person not to go for a job as they won’t be able to afford the accommodation. Young people are getting trapped.’

Stakeholder

Although young people usually have to remain dependent on benefits while in supported accommodation, those benefits are inadequate to meet young people’s basic needs. Issues with Universal Credit and the welfare system were raised frequently by stakeholders and young people. This was evidently having an impact on their health and wellbeing and was causing them to accrue arrears for rent and service charges, utilities and other living costs. We heard examples of young people with serious medical conditions not being able to apply successfully for disability support and not being able to access help to do so.

‘We have to pay a service charge each month on top and at the moment I can’t even afford it you know. Without PIP I’m struggling. I missed it and then my arrears were £100... they told me I would have a 28-day notice.’

Young person

A concerning issue that was raised by young people was the difficulty some had managing their finances. This was leading not only to arrears but also to young people going without food.

This meant they were, in some cases, using food banks or accessing food donations. In other cases they were simply going hungry.

We heard of young people helping each other out financially and with food but also heard of young people being forced to leave accommodation because they were in debt to associates, including those involved in criminal activity, and as such placed the other residents at risk.

‘There were times where he was going hungry but we wouldn’t watch him go hungry, we seen he didn’t have food we would be like, look, do you want some food? We’ll give you some food for you to have.’

Young person

Some stakeholders felt that young people are often misunderstood and the emotional impact of their situations under-estimated, whilst their ability to cope emotionally and financially is over-estimated.

‘More understanding is needed of how young people may be feeling and coping. Finances – some clients are not mature enough to deal with finances and prioritising bills etc. Again they may be thinking of today not the future, and planning ahead is not a priority for them.’

Local authority stakeholder

‘I try to manage my money, it’s difficult and hard... and I am struggling.’

Young person

‘They go on about rent and that but some of us have even got kids of our own to look after, so of course I have a son I have to look after too and if I have to help his mum with the things he needs then some months I will find it hard to pay rent. They don’t understand or support us with that. When you have a kid to look after and have to try and live on £150 a month it doesn’t work out at all.’

Young person

Ceri’s story

Ceri is 24 with three young children. Her private landlord increased the rent suddenly. She was also benefit capped at the time and began to accrue significant debt. Her family helped find a house, otherwise she and three children would have had to go to a hostel. No financial assistance, advice or support was provided to address her arrears or other debts. ‘I tried every service but they said find a place yourself. My family helped massively as they helped find my current landlord, however my current place is only a two year lease.’

What can we do?

We need to review the accommodation on offer and try to factor in the transitions that young people would be expected to take including from care, into employment and into independent living. It cannot be right that young people are unable to begin work because they will be unable to afford their accommodation. It cannot be right that young people are forced to stay dependent on benefits that are inadequate to meet their basic needs.

'We need a buffer for three months, where they can work, because the majority of the time young people will choose employment over supported housing even if they're not ready for fully independent living and then when their job or tenancy fails they struggle to get back in.'

Stakeholder

As well as a financial buffer, young people moving into employment may need peace and quiet at night so they can get into a regular daily pattern.

'All my sleeping pattern has changed in here. I used to work when I lived with my parents... I got in here and people keep you up and it's noisy. It doesn't feel the same. I don't feel like I can find work in this place and I told my work coach that I am not looking for work because I want to get into a flat first. I don't want to go to a job feeling knackered and stressed because of this place.'

Young person

Lack of interventions

Many local authority practitioners felt that young people are often ill equipped to maintain their accommodation, struggle to adhere to rules, fail to understand the consequences of their behaviour and budget their finances effectively.

'Lack of engagement with support, support providers giving up too easily, young people not understanding consequences – not being taught before 18 that behaviour in supported accommodation can result in loss etc.'

Local authority stakeholder

Young people and stakeholders in temporary and supported accommodation felt that often the support available within the accommodation wasn't adequate or intensive enough. This was the case in projects that had zero-evictions policies as well as those that did carry out evictions. It was felt that with better commissioning and higher ratios of support workers to young people most issues could be prevented and addressed in a holistic and trauma-informed way.

'As soon as I went there my mental health dipped because of how shit the support was, because of how shit I felt being there, because it constantly felt like stepping on eggshells.'

Young person

'I don't know because all the staff do is talk to the people after the issue not before, and then when it is kicking off the staff say they are not allowed to intervene. Someone threw a chair through the cooker and the staff did nothing because they said they are not allowed to intervene. So I don't feel that the staff can keep us safe.'

Young person

We also heard from some young people that the transition from care into supported accommodation, and from supported accommodation into independent living, was too sudden a change. It was felt that support often reduced drastically rather than tapering off.

'To be honest I don't really like it here, I've gone from being surrounded by staff 24/7 one to one to nothing here. There's no support, nothing. I don't even know what is going to happen now. I don't know how long I'm going to be here and no one is giving me any direction.'

Young person

Young people reported inconsistency around rules and interventions. This was felt to be confusing for all living and working within the accommodation. There was a strong feeling that the rules should be clear and applied consistently. Establishing tangible boundaries was seen as important to make sure that accommodation felt like a safe place for young people to be.

'They (support staff) used to lock themselves in the office. They never used to watch anything that happened, they literally just used to go in, lock the door, and that was it... they never used to support us, they literally just used to lock themselves away and then as soon as they heard us like shouting they would come out and instantly blame us.'

Young person

'There was an incident and after I felt very vulnerable and very on edge because that's meant to be my home. I felt like violated, and I wanted to put a report in, I wanted to put in some incident like report so they were aware of it but they wouldn't do anything.'

Young person

Similarly, a high turnover of staff was felt to be unfair and destabilising. Staff burnout leads to high use of agency workers who have no relationship with the young people and to whom young people might have to re-tell their stories again and again, a potentially re-traumatising experience.

In the same way that clear boundaries need to be in place, support has to be accessible, consistent and intensive enough to prevent problems from occurring and be able to address them when they do. Young people clearly stated a desire for more intensive and meaningful support.

'It was constantly either agency staff or the normal staff that would be there, but it would be like a different member of staff pretty much every day.'

Young person

'Well there have been some changes, there is a new manager and there is a tiny bit more support than there was. But it's awkward because the majority of staff are via an agency so it's not people you know or can get to know.'

Young person

Some staff said that despite their organisations' intention and ethos of working to create a psychologically informed environment (PIE), the reality was far from PIE. We heard of instances where there were staff lone working, high resident-to-support worker ratios and a lack of opportunities for participation.

'They're OK in here (the staff), you know the rules and that. It does depend who's on, some of them are laid back, a bit too laid back. The people in here are aggressive towards them. The staff even quit because of the behaviour in here and the rumours, and made to feel like not wanting to come here to work.'

Young person

Carly's story

Carly was 18 and staying in supported accommodation with three other young people. They had a good bond with each other but struggled to have positive relationships with staff. They described a continuous cycle of staff with a high turnover. When the staff were there they would stay in the office and often lock the door behind them. Carly admits that the young people could be boisterous but that they felt that this was misunderstood by the staff, resulting in them being threatened with eviction on a daily basis. She felt that the staff spoke to them in a dismissive and rude way and the four residents all felt that that staff didn't 'like' them. This led to an 'us and them' culture.

In general needs social housing, it was felt that evictions usually only occur when the tenant has failed to engage with support. In most cases, once an issue has emerged such as arrears or anti-social behaviour, work is done with individuals to address the root causes and support offered to meet their needs. However, if the tenant didn't cooperate or engage with that process then they would likely be evicted.

'We don't evict many. If we're giving a 28-day notice we work hard to get them somewhere else. The ones who get immediate exclusions are due to risk to staff and other residents. Very few and far between, usually eviction is due to criminal behaviour that goes beyond "nuisance".'

Stakeholder

However, a common issue for providers of both social and supported accommodation and, more importantly, for young people, was the difficulty accessing specialist support such as mental health therapies and support for addictions.

'The reason I overdosed was because the day before when that argument... my support worker was meant to take me to the doctors for a mental health review and he refused to take me and didn't tell me until half an hour before that he wouldn't take me... it felt like my mental health didn't matter, I didn't matter felt like I was being discriminated against because I was a kid in care. Because we lived in a hostel pretty much, that is what it felt like.'

Young person

What can we do?

Person-centred and holistic support is vital to help young tenants to maintain their tenancies. However, this may not be the experience of every young person either in supported or general needs social housing.

Zero evictions must not equate to zero interventions. We need a conversation about how to ensure that services are commissioned in a way that creates a consistent approach. Services must be sufficiently resourced to provide young people with adequate support.

'When I went into my own place I didn't know anything. If I'd had someone who was supporting me every day for the few weeks I would have learnt how to cope and would have been fine.'

Young person

Young people told us that there was support there but that 'you had to go and look for it'. This may be possible and easy for some young people; however, many young people may struggle to ask for help. We did hear that where the right support was available it was highly valued by young people and was felt to lead to positive outcomes.

'This support worker actually sits there and he talks and tries to get to the bottom of things and gets what's going on so I'm happy there.'

Young person

We heard that some social housing providers were circumventing the system and funding their own support services with the sole aim of addressing the unmet needs of tenants in crisis. It was felt that it wasn't necessarily 'extra work' but 'different work' that not only saved a tenancy, but provided some response and assistance where none was available elsewhere.

'Because we know what it is like out there with policies and procedures it's almost like we're better off doing it ourselves, it's the better way for people rather than leaving them in crisis waiting for a specialist agency to pick them up. If we work closely enough in the right way we find that after a while they no longer feel the need for that service, they're equipped to manage and live happy, full lives.'

Stakeholder

Good practice

A housing association revised their approach to supporting tenants with active substance misuse issues. One tenant was injecting and wanted help coming off drugs. The housing association supported his referral and accompanied him to a substance misuse service for assessment. Subsequently he received a letter saying his application had been accepted and he is on the waiting list for a methadone script. He now receives these letters every eight weeks to check that he still wants to be on the waiting list. He was told that if he committed a crime he would be fast-tracked for a script. In the past the housing association would have responded to his ongoing situation in a way that would be likely to have led to some kind of enforcement. However they have decided instead to respond from a person-centred position which manages the potential risk but is also kind and supportive. The landlord continues to support the tenant during his wait for a script.

Barriers to moving on from supported accommodation

Another significant issue facing young people in supported accommodation was the challenges faced when trying to move on. Barriers to social and private rented accommodation were frequently described, and resulted in young people becoming trapped and stuck in limbo.

'The tenancy training is only half a day and that is not enough, but I haven't done it yet and that is why they won't house me. I'm on a waiting list to do it.'

Young person

'The tenancy shouldn't be conditional on the training. You could put it in after the tenancy and move, and work closely to help them get used to living on their own. How much of the tenancy training do young people actually take in really? Half a day's training; I used to switch off after a bit in school so it might not be that effective. So having the practical support in there once they've taken the tenancy over might be better.'

Stakeholder

Barriers to private renting include landlords refusing to accept young people in receipt of housing benefit and affordability due to the level of the Shared Accommodation Rate. Moreover, many stakeholders felt that the private rented sector was not ideal for young people to live in due to the risk of exposure to poor management, poor quality and safeguarding issues.

'There are no options for young people other than PRS which isn't affordable. The local authority puts barriers in the way of people accessing social housing so there really are no options.'

Stakeholder

Barriers to social housing were described as extensive, stemming from an inadequate supply of shared and one-bed accommodation affordable for young people. These barriers included a refusal to grant tenancies to people under the age of 18, despite legally being able to grant

a tenancy that is held in trust; and exclusions from the housing register due to arrears from supported or temporary accommodation. Stakeholders felt that many social landlords are overly risk-averse and described examples of them requesting a young person's full support case file history. It was felt that this would have been beneficial if they were genuinely trying to identify and understand the support needs of the young person to prepare and manage the tenancy. However, those support needs were often viewed as a risk which meant that the young person wasn't 'tenancy ready'.

'We try to secure a move on but how would you do that if you have got someone who won't engage? The council require evidence that they're ready for move on and other agencies won't take referral due to the non-engagement. We don't seek to ruin chances with the local authority, but they ask for the support plan, warning notices, eviction letters, they want to do hand-over on the phone so if the young person has been difficult the local authority will find out.'

Stakeholder

'At the moment they have said about putting me on a training tenancy but they have been promising me that for a whole year and still have not done it. I just want to get out of here as quickly as possible.'

Young person

What can we do?

Young people told us that they wanted to feel prepared and capable to manage their new accommodation. Likewise, social housing providers also felt that key to a successful tenancy was starting it 'right'.

The Housing First movement has demonstrated that anyone can sustain a tenancy with the right support. Expectations around 'tenancy readiness' are unnecessary and create barriers to housing. Instead of seeing young people in terms of 'risk' and 'readiness', providers should get to know their new tenants as people and then work to put the right support in place early on. Tenancy training can be valuable but should not be a pre-tenancy requirement keeping young people away from stable homes for any period of time. Instead, efforts should be focused on early tenancy stabilisation.

Income maximisation and support with budgeting are well-proven methods which help with tenancy sustainment. Intensive support in the first few weeks, help to claim relevant benefits, help to reduce outgoings and debts and support to set up home ensure that the young person has the best possible chance to sustain their tenancy.

'You have to have your own skills and responsibilities so that you can and are able to live on your own. If the council move anyone in they should make sure they can cope.'

Young person

'Our frontline staff are empowered to give people furniture, kitchen equipment etc., whatever they need, without having to get senior sign off.'

Stakeholder

Good Practice

Get Ready & Move On (GRAMO) is a pre-tenancy short training course for people in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) who are preparing for a tenancy. It can also be provided for those who are already tenants who need to build skills in a particular aspect of managing their tenancy. There are sessions tailored for young people and adults aged 25 and over, as well as one-to-one sessions where needed.

The course covers:

- Who can help?
- Which type of accommodation?
- Understanding a tenancy agreement
- Paying for your housing.

The GRAMO project is an integral part of move-on arrangements in RCT. There is an emphasis on swift delivery so that it does not become a barrier to moving into permanent accommodation.

Activities, participation and voice

Many young people described a lack of opportunity to participate in activities and tasks within supported accommodation on a regular basis. We heard of examples of cooking classes, life skills and tenancy training but it was felt that they were too sporadic and rare.

‘There’s nothing to do and people get bored and then get into trouble. If there was more to do and activities it would be better. We’ve got so many young people in there and it has become really chaotic and childish, they throw eggs at the windows and stuff. I’ve lived in a children’s home and they were better behaved in there.’

Young person

‘There is nothing for young people to do during the day. Routes into education, training and employment are not working and particularly for the ones who are not academic.’

Stakeholder

‘There could be more to do in the day, it would help 100% to keep people occupied so they don’t get bored and do stupid stuff.’

Young person

Stakeholders also felt that more participatory activities would help to keep the young people occupied and less likely to engage with other risky or problematic behaviours. They felt that many of the issues that arise between residents within the accommodation are due to a lack of purpose.

'They are meant to do workshops for life skills with us but they never go on. We are supposed to get support sessions with our support worker as part of our contract at least once a week. But they don't bother arranging them, you have to go to them and ask. I went six weeks without a session recently because the support worker is off on the sick. The support worker they've given me works exactly the same hours on the same day that I do volunteering so it's really hard to get to see her.'

Young person

Young people told us that they wanted to be more involved with the way their accommodation was managed. They wanted to have a say in changes and decisions that were made and wanted the rules and policies to be applied consistently and clearly.

'It would help if we understood how and why decisions are being made and we get kept out of that. It would be nice for staff to involve us more, especially if they are moving someone back, it would be good to know what they are going to do to make sure it doesn't happen again.'

Young person

What can we do?

We need to find a way to support young people to find their purpose and participate with meaningful activities.

There were examples of activities taking place within projects which young people felt very positively about. We need to ensure that projects are commissioned to be able to provide more of this and focus on building meaning and purpose into young people's lives.

Young people must have a say and be listened to. They should be included in planning, designing and managing their accommodation. There are numerous ways to achieve this and not every person will feel confident sharing their views publicly; whether in a group setting or face to face, we must be prepared to actively listen whenever and wherever possible.

What can we do when problems do occur?

Stakeholders and young people told us that inevitably problems will arise and made suggestions of how they could be managed. However, it is important to note such problems were seen as partly arising from current working practices. Embedding person-centred, psychologically informed working practices would prevent many problems arising in the first place.

Managed moves

Stakeholders felt strongly that at times it is essential to move a particular young person elsewhere in order to protect other residents and to find that young person an environment more appropriate for their needs. Young people agreed with this view.

'There have been a number of serious incidents with things like people setting things on fire, destroying half the house and they won't get evicted for that, but for rent and that they do. Although even then they don't get evicted, they only actually get evicted if they are £300 in rent arrears.'

Young person

We heard from stakeholders that this is the preferred approach and that they do try to obtain alternative accommodation when an eviction is taking place; however, there are occasions when this is difficult. Particular issues were raised such as partnership working, suitable alternatives and support to do this from commissioners and local authorities.

'I think that there needs to be clear steps and consequences for young people so that there is an element of predictability. This would include steps within a system that young people know and recognise so can see where the lines are drawn. I also think using managed moves tactically is a good idea, as a clear message of what behaviour will not be tolerated.'

Stakeholder

Young people felt that this was a fair approach but were concerned that it could be used as a punishment, and might lead to some young people being moved into unsuitable accommodation. They also felt that there should be a clear system and process that is applied consistently and fairly.

Stakeholders raised concerns that although this is an effective approach, securing alternative accommodation takes time and planning.

'What happens on a Saturday evening when you have casual staff on shift and a young person comes in under the influence and kicking off threatening staff and other young people, what alternative accommodation can you get on a weekend?'

Stakeholder

Crisis intervention teams

The idea of crisis intervention teams was widely supported by those working and living in supported accommodation. The team would comprise professionals with specialist skills (such as mental health professionals, police and youth workers) who would be able to access the accommodation the young person was living in and support them intensively. It was felt that this would help the young person manage their situation and behaviour and avoid an exclusion, but also ensure that staff and other residents also feel safe in the meanwhile.

‘Yeah it’s because they’ve stuck with me and actually tried even when they’ve seen me on my bad days where I’ve gone mad they have sat there and tried, they haven’t just given up on me.’

Young person

Case conferences

In the instances where a young person is clearly headed for an eviction, a multi-agency case conference could take place to plan the safety, support and move-on for the young person. Stakeholders felt that partnership working and cooperation would be essential to this being successful and would result in an element of accountability from services working with the young person to evidence what they have done.

Good Practice

The Salvation Army in partnership with Taff Housing Association and Church Army have come together to deliver a new, innovative approach to supporting more than 106 young people who experience homelessness across Cardiff.

Commissioned by Cardiff City Council, the approach is designed according to psychologically informed principles: accepting all referrals, having zero evictions and working with young people for up to a year after they leave services to ensure long-term stability.

Young people have a range of accommodation options, from larger supported hostels to semi-independent flats. Each partner service has created a welcoming, home-like environment in which to build on every opportunity for positive interactions and inspiring relationships.

Services look to support the young person with the underlying issues rather than the behaviour. Understanding why young people demonstrate challenging behaviour that may lead to them being asked to leave is a key part of reducing ‘asked to leave’ situations and the partnership ensures that choice and suitable options are always available for young people whenever they need them.

Where there is any significant risk of placement failing, multi-disciplinary meetings are coordinated by The Salvation Army bringing all key partners involved in the support of the young person. This multi-disciplinary approach ensures that all services and partners can work together to find a common language and framework to best support the young person, avoid any negative reaction from the contract such as eviction, and ensure that each young person has the best chance of positive housing and support outcomes.

Knowing when to hand over

Stakeholders described feeling overwhelmed at times by the issues young people presented with. This was particularly evident in cases of young people using and selling substances, and being aggressive and violent. It was felt that as housing professionals they are expected to manage everything: involving the police or mental health specialists is seen as a negative move and letting the young person down.

This could result in these behaviours not being addressed at the expense of the staff and other young people in the accommodation.

'I reckon they need to get involved with people, with like other services to help them to get them out of that situation, to get them the right help to get them out of that. Because there's obviously a reason why they're involved in it. So, instead of just trying to kick them out and put them on the streets, where the likelihood is they're going to get done for something else, they're going to end up in prison, they're going to end up stabbed. Nah you just need to try and get them help, not just kick them out.'

Young person

Some stakeholders were keen to emphasise the need for housing professionals to work with other agencies and 'stop trying to do it all'. Interestingly this was also raised by the young people themselves: they recognised that certain behaviours and actions should trigger a certain response and reported being confused when this didn't happen.

Good Practice

Sedgemoor Council has established 'Together Teams'. Teams comprise representatives from local social landlords, police, health, social services, local schools and other services. They regularly meet and share information about people in the community who are showing early signs of problems such as early rent arrears; often finding the same households also showing signs of issues within other services. The team then decides which is the right agency to assist the household and build a relationship with them. This has helped Homes in Sedgemoor to achieve zero evictions for rent arrears.

Preventing problems with psychologically informed environments

'We are looking at solutions within the current context, which is not ideal. If PIE isn't executed in the transformative way in which it was intended, but as a set of skills, then we're not going to truly achieve this. It is not something that is done "to" young people but "with" staff working with young people and has to be reflected across the wider system.'

Stakeholder

We heard from stakeholders the overwhelming desire to be able to provide psychologically informed environments (PIE) but also heard the barriers to be able to do so.

‘True PIE would be preventative and evictions would be rare. Staffing levels are always going to be a topic of conversation because the PIE way is not to book appointments, just be there when the resident needs you and not to time limit it, but everyone is constrained by time due to funding and resources. The whole system needs changing and services commissioned to be done properly, even the way they commission, they are driving down standards.’

Stakeholder

‘PIE has to include commissioners and projects have to be resourced to be PIE. The problem we have with PIE is that we have been given the training with PATH which is great, but what are the next steps? How do we embed that within the projects to work in a fully PIE way? Or is it just another one of those things, like “person-centred”, has become where it’s a buzz word and organisations are saying “we work in a PIE way” and you absolutely know that they don’t. How do we make sure that it’s not a buzzword and is reality?’

Stakeholder

Tyler’s story

Tyler is 18 and has learning difficulties. He is living in social housing but not engaging with his housing officer at all. He had mentioned in a previous conversation that he liked horses. His housing officer organised for him to have some riding lessons and to spend time at the stables. This helped to establish a relationship with the housing officer and it gave Tyler a purpose, opportunity to build new relationships and it’s given him something to look forward to and enjoy.

Psychologically Informed Environments: more than ‘an intervention’

By Charlotte Waite, Director of Transformation and Systems Change, Platform

The Prevention, Aces, Trauma and Homelessness (PATH) training has been successful at raising awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to staff across the housing and homelessness sector in Wales. Given that someone is 16 times more likely to become homeless if they have experienced ACEs⁷ this feels like an important start. But ‘start’ is the operative word here: awareness-raising increases empathy and understanding and PIEs are in abundance across homelessness services.

However, this report makes evident that we still have a long way to go. As Shelter Cymru’s Trapped on the Streets⁸ report also makes plain, awareness does nothing to change

7 <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/aces/voices-of-those-with-lived-experiences-of-homelessness-and-adversity-in-wales-informing-prevention-and-response-2019/>

8 <https://sheltercymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Trapped-on-the-Streets-Full-Report.pdf>

behaviour within a system that often feels oppressive to opportunities for empathy and relational practice.

The ambition in Wales as I see it is to apply PIE with rigour and creativity so that it is more than a model of support but instead challenges the system. Creating psychologically informed environments, as the name would suggest, means deploying more than an intervention. The five elements of a PIE are well known by now (Psychological Framework, Evidence Generating Practice, Environments, Staff Support and Training and Relationships) and there is much room for development if we are to achieve the ambitions of its reach in Wales.

One of the areas ripe for development is 'Evidence Generating Practice': this means so much more than gathering outcomes data and reporting zero evictions. This means having active mechanisms in place so that people are listened to, leadership is collaborative and a learning culture is nurtured. This can only happen if 'failure' is normalised. Sometimes things will go wrong: for example, the mix of residents creates a perfect storm for exacerbating problems the service was intended to ameliorate, or an unintended consequence of a no-evictions policy, left unchecked, can mean that staff feel unsafe by the weapons they know tenants are carrying. Staff feeling unsafe means the very foundations of a PIE are undermined. Without safety there is no PIE. Without the mechanism to really listen to staff and people using services 'the way we do things' quickly becomes static and can revert to risk assessing, form filling and fitting people into what's on offer as an attempt at generating safety. The system will pull us back to the functions that keep the status quo: we can only challenge this by listening to and acting on knowledge, insight and experience of what's working and what's not.

Another is 'Staff Support and Training': the elephant in this room is reflective practice. Does your organisation/team accept that distressing emotions can be inevitable and therefore does it create space and time to talk about challenges of work? Does your team recognise that stress and unmanaged conflict can easily dominate a work environment? How intrinsic is reflective practice in the fabric of your organisation? If it is not intrinsic, you are not PIE. We cannot challenge a broken system if we are invested in our positions within it, holding our 'expert' positions, boundaries and thresholds.

And finally 'Relationships': this has to include the relationships between all parts of the system. Do we recognise ourselves as part of living system and are we aware and listening to the feedback loops that maintain the status quo? If we don't we will miss this opportunity to use this good practice movement for system change.

Good practice

Merthyr and The Valleys Mind Residential Resilience Project provides self-help to people at risk of homelessness, living in temporary hostel and supported housing services across Rhondda Cynon Taf. The project works together to support and develop a PIE approach through one-to-one or group psycho-education and by offering counselling to residents. Officers introduce tenants to a range of Mind self-help materials that are centred on the five principles of wellbeing: connecting, learning, keeping active, take notice and giving to others.

Good practice

Pembrokeshire Youth Service has developed an innovative approach to help young people understand official communications from their landlord. The service recognised that many young people reported having difficulty understanding formal letters. As a solution, the service worked with colleagues in Housing to start producing videos that provide easily understandable information relating to the contents of these letters. The videos are filmed with young people who have themselves accessed housing support. The aim of this is to make ensure the information is presented by individuals to whom young people can relate. Videos are hosted on a closed Youtube channel and are linked to QR codes which are printed at the bottom of relevant letters.

Conclusions: So what can we do to stop the cycle of youth homelessness?

It is right to focus on young people first in the movement to achieve zero evictions into homelessness in Wales. The earlier and more often someone experiences homelessness, the more likely they are to develop complex issues that might mean they become homeless repeatedly throughout their adult life.

While there is much good work going on to help young people out of homelessness and into independent living, there is too much inconsistency. Some providers have zero-evictions policies already in place, while others admit that they do sometimes evict when they don't know how else to manage situations. As a result, youth homelessness is being created by the very services that are set up to prevent it. There is however much existing good practice and learning that can be shared across Wales.

Because there is not enough housing that's affordable for young people, supported accommodation has become the default. But supported accommodation is generally only affordable through welfare benefits, meaning that young people who have left care, or who have become homeless after leaving the family home, are being pushed into a system that actively prevents them getting employment and gaining independence. At the same time, because benefits are inadequate to meet young people's basic needs they are experiencing poverty and in some cases going hungry.

We need to change the system so that all young people who have a good chance of sustaining their own tenancy with support are enabled to do so.

We need social landlords to step up provision of homes that young people can afford to live in.

We need to take a fundamental look at the benefits system, including financial supports that are delivered within Wales as well as those delivered by UK Government, and consider how benefits can better help young people through the transitions in their lives, especially transitions into work.

We need to move away from large-scale supported projects where young people may be at risk of exposure to unwelcome influences.

And we need all providers of social and supported housing to adopt a zero-evictions approach, so that young people are no longer kept in a constant state of insecurity with the threat of homelessness hanging over their head.

As this report describes, zero evictions into homelessness does not mean zero interventions. Accommodation needs to be safe and secure for all residents. Psychologically informed ways of working can prevent many problems arising in the first place; and when a young person has to be moved for their own and others' best interests, agencies need to work together to support the young person through a managed move into a home that's more suitable for their needs. This multi-agency approach is achievable, as long as it is resourced: increasing the Housing Support Grant is a vital step to give young people a strong start in independent living.

The lessons learned from this work can be applied across the housing system as a whole, so that no tenant in Wales is evicted into homelessness.

Principles to guide how social landlords and service providers can end evictions into homelessness have been developed by Shelter Cymru, Community Housing Cymru and the Welsh Local Government Association. The Principles are at Appendix 3 of this report.

Key lessons from this report

1. A right to adequate housing for young people

No young person should become homeless as a result of an eviction from social or supported housing. Providers across Wales should commit to adopting the Principles and ending evictions into homelessness, with young people as a priority. Commissioners of support services should build zero-evictions requirements into tenders. If this voluntary approach is not successful, the Welsh Government should legislate to protect young people from eviction into homelessness. The Welsh Government should also consider how to encourage the private rented sector to engage with this approach.

2. Increase the choice of housing for young people

Providers of social housing should plan to meet the housing needs of young people in their area, so that supported accommodation is not the only option. Local authorities should ensure that young people's support needs are fully addressed in Local Development Plans.

3. Provide young people with financial support to get on with their lives

It needs to be made easier for young people who are leaving care or becoming homeless from the family home to move into independent living and into work. The Welsh Government should consider what financial support can be provided within existing



powers, if necessary exploring devolution of aspects of the welfare system so that young people are not kept out of employment because of the cost of supported housing rents and service charges.

4. Ensure adequate support is accessible to all young people who need it

Adequate levels of psychologically informed support should be available to all young people. The Welsh Government should continue the current commitment to funding support services. The Housing Support Grant should be increased and commissioning should be reorganised to provide more intensive floating support to young people living independently.

5. Strengthen the homelessness safety net

The Welsh Government should give all young people aged under 25 priority need for housing, and should extend the current ban on intentional homelessness to all under-25s.

6. Establish an evidence base on youth evictions

The Welsh Government should monitor and publish the numbers of young people being evicted from both supported and social housing across Wales.

Appendix 1: Young people's rights under tenancies and licences

Excluded licences

If a young person is granted a licence it means that they simply have been given permission to occupy a property. There is no intention to create a legal relationship with the owner.

Most young people who hold a licence will be excluded from the basic legal protection given to other forms of occupier and will be known as an 'excluded occupier' or 'excluded licensee'. Examples of situations where a young person might be an 'excluded licensee' include where:

- they share living accommodation, such as a kitchen or bathroom, with a resident private landlord
- they are living in a hostel provided by a housing association or council
- they are living in interim accommodation provided by the council following a homelessness application (for example, a Bed and Breakfast or hostel)
- they are living with friends or family.

Excluded licensees have limited rights and can be evicted very easily. The landlord only has to give them 'reasonable' notice which can be written or verbal. There are no set rules governing how long is reasonable but it can depend on how long they have occupied the property and the length of the rental period. If the young person does not leave after the notice has ended, the landlord can evict them without needing to get a court order.

Protected licences

There are some situations where a young person might hold a licence but still have the basic legal protection of being able to remain in the property until the landlord gives them a valid legal notice and obtains a court order for possession. These are known as 'protected licensees' and might include where:

- a council has accepted a legal duty to secure accommodation for the young person following a homelessness application (sometimes referred to as 'the final duty') and is providing them with temporary accommodation whilst they secure something more suitable.

Introductory tenancy (for council housing)

A young person may become an introductory tenant if their council runs an introductory tenancy scheme (not all councils do).

An introductory tenancy lasts for 12 months from the date the tenancy started or the date the tenant moved in – whichever is later. Young people will normally become a secure tenant automatically after the first year has passed as long as the council doesn't:

- start action to evict them during the 12 month period, or
- decide to extend their introductory tenancy for a further six months.

The council can't discriminate by only giving introductory tenancies to some people and not to others. If the council has an introductory tenancy scheme, it must apply to all new tenants, not just young people.

Introductory tenants can be evicted relatively easily. The council doesn't have to prove a legal reason in court but they have to follow the correct procedure. They have to give at least four weeks' notice of eviction.

Starter tenancy (for housing associations)

A young person may have a starter tenancy if:

- their housing association has a policy that all new tenancies will be starter tenancies, or
- they live in a designated area for starter tenancies, and
- the length of time specified for the starter tenancy (normally 12 months) has not yet ended.

A starter tenancy is an assured shorthold tenancy granted for an initial probationary period. It will give less rights and less protection from eviction than a secure or assured tenant will have. Most housing associations will give a starter tenancy for the first year, but tenants should check to see what it says in their tenancy agreement.

At the end of the starter tenancy you should automatically become an assured tenant if your housing association does not take steps to evict you.

Starter tenants can be evicted fairly easily. Housing associations can only bring a starter tenancy to an end by obtaining a court order for possession. It doesn't have to prove a legal reason in court, and if it follows the correct procedure the judge will have no choice but to order an eviction. Your housing association must give you at least two months' written notice that it is going to ask the court to evict you but doesn't have to explain its reasons why.

Assured shorthold tenancies (for private rented housing)

Most young people who rent a property from a private landlord will be assured shorthold tenants.

An assured shorthold tenancy is a tenancy that gives someone a legal right to live in the accommodation for a period of time. This might be for a set period such as six months (known as a fixed term tenancy), or it might roll on a week to week or month to month basis (known as a periodic tenancy).

Young people with assured shorthold tenancies can also be evicted fairly easily. The landlord does not need to prove a reason to evict them unless the tenancy is within a fixed term. A landlord must however follow the correct procedure, which involves giving a valid, written notice and getting a possession order from the county court.

If the landlord is claiming the tenant has done something wrong (such as not paying the rent) the notice may only need to be two weeks in length. If, however, the landlord doesn't have a reason for eviction, the notice must be at least two calendar months or the same period for which rent is paid, whichever is longer.

If the young person does not leave by the end of the notice period, the landlord can apply for a court order. The court has no choice but to make an order to evict assured shorthold tenants if the correct procedure has been followed.

16 and 17 year olds

Children and young people under the age of 18 years cannot hold a legal interest in land, so are unable to hold a tenancy.

There are ways that a landlord might however grant occupation rights to 16 and 17 year olds. These include:

- granting a tenancy to a third party on trust for the child or young person until s/he reaches the age of 18. The third party might be an adult relative or friend or a social worker and is in effect a caretaker of the tenancy. The trustee is responsible for ensuring the rent is paid, but is not liable to pay the rent out of her/his own resources unless s/he gives a personal guarantee to do so
- holding the tenancy on trust themselves for the child or young person until s/he reaches 18
- granting a joint tenancy to the child or young person and someone who is aged 18 or over
- granting them a licence.

Appendix 2: Principles for ending evictions into homelessness from social housing

Evidence shows that the largest proportion of people, approaching services, who are homeless or imminently homeless are in that situation because of a loss of rented accommodation, or as a result of a relationship breakup. Loss of rented accommodation is from both social and private rented sectors, the largest proportion likely to be from the private sector. In addition there will be households becoming homeless through the loss of temporary accommodation.

The first part of the paper sets out some principles regarding an approach to zero evictions into homelessness from the social sector. It is recommended that once the partnerships outlined are in place and working they should be extended to the PRS and Temporary Accommodation providers.

Ending Evictions into Homelessness from Social Housing – Draft Definition and Principles

Definition

No one should become homeless (within the statutory definition) following eviction from social housing.

Principles

- Partners will work together to aim for no evictions, but where evictions are unavoidable to end evictions into homelessness from social housing.
- The perceived or actual non-engagement of tenants in this process will not be a reason for a household becoming homeless following eviction.
- Landlords, Local authorities and partners will work together to minimise evictions altogether, whether or not into homelessness. These partnerships will be maintained into risk of eviction.
- The use of legal eviction action should be avoided where possible. NOSPs will not be used as a means of engaging with tenants struggling to maintain tenancies.
- Landlords will work with tenants to develop relationships based on a personalised approach.
- Local authorities will work with public services and support providers to commission support mechanisms to prevent evictions, using the Housing Support Grant and other funding streams.

- If on the rare occasion there is no alternative to eviction, alternative accommodation must meet the needs of the household (personalised solution) and Local Authority and other partners will work together to find the best solution – this will include consideration of:
 - Proximity to schools, workplace, health services
 - Affordability
 - Size
- There should be continuation of support for as long as it is needed following eviction/ managed move into the alternative tenancy.
- Alternative accommodation should be social housing where possible.
- A personalised, Psychologically Informed and holistic approach should be used. This should include the use of Personalised Housing Plans and case conferences.
- This approach to be formalised as part of a voluntary pre-action protocol.

Key Partners

- All social landlords in the area (LA and HAs)
- Local Authority (social services, homelessness, housing, youth services & education)
- Health board(s) (particularly mental health and substance misuse teams)
- Independent advocate(s) (e.g. Shelter Cymru, Citizen's Advice)
- Police
- Private landlords
- Providers of temporary accommodation.

There needs to be effective monitoring to prevent the use of unsuitable and/or unsustainable accommodation placements to avoid homelessness, and to measure the effectiveness of this system. A baseline needs to be established for effective monitoring.

The partnerships outline above to be developed into an urgent local 'zero evictions into homelessness' case conference service for social and private landlords and TA providers, which brings together all key public and third sector services when a landlord is considering an eviction or serving a notice. The aim of the case conference is to either deploy services to assist households to maintain their current tenancy (a housing first approach for existing tenants) or to identify alternative suitable accommodation and support.

Other key elements to support this approach:

- 1.** Access to increased support and advice for private landlords and TA providers and their tenants, which replicates social landlord networks.
- 2.** A commitment by local services and providers to engage with the zero evictions policy.
- 3.** All public services to have a responsibility to take positive action to help tenants avoid losing their home and to engage with other services to ensure this happens.
- 4.** More support services to help people manage their tenancies and to be provided for as long as they are needed with no artificial time constraints in place.
- 5.** Increased advice and advocacy support that seeks to prevent homelessness either by keeping people in their current home where appropriate, or alternative appropriate accommodation on a temporary basis while long term solutions are identified, or finding alternative secure accommodation.
- 6.** Ensure public campaigns are in place which help people identify potential issues at an early stage and promote advice and support services.

Developed by Community Housing Cymru,
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Appendix 3: Further reading

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