



## **Supplementary evidence to the Equal Opportunities Committee on Homelessness and Young People**

I would like to thank you on behalf of Barnardo's Scotland and of our 16+ Edinburgh Children's Services Manager, Sharon Munro, for the opportunity to give evidence to the Equal Opportunities Committee on the issue of homelessness and young people. We would like to take up the offer to submit additional written evidence which we feel will be of value for your forthcoming report.

We wish to highlight some of the key areas where our Barnardo's Scotland service experience illustrates the continuing issues around the homelessness and young people. In addition, we believe that the incoming Welfare Reform Bill provides an opportunity to begin proactive discussions on how to efforts to tackle homelessness among young people in Scotland can be coordinated with new devolved responsibilities arising from the new legislation. However, we have serious concerns around the impact of the Welfare Reform Bill, particularly regarding the speed of its introduction and implementation, and the lack of detail in some areas.

The focus of the following evidence is on care leavers which we believe is appropriate given the large number of homeless people across the UK who have experience of car (over the thirty percent according to Who Cares? UK).

### **About Barnardo's Scotland**

Barnardo's Scotland is a national voluntary organisation and works directly with more than 10,000, children, young people and their families in over 98 specialised services in local communities across Scotland which cover fostering, parenting, substance misuse, offending, homelessness, and abuse. Most of the children and families we work with have some degree of interaction with the welfare system, and this UK legislation will have a profound impact on their lives.

### **Key issues for Barnardo's Scotland**

Our supplementary evidence on homelessness and young people is broken down into the following areas:

- **Homelessness issues for vulnerable young people**
- **Care leavers vulnerability to becoming homeless**
- **Welfare reforms and changes in housing**
- **Pro active preventative spend**
- **Case study from a Barnardo's Scotland service**

## **Homelessness issues for vulnerable young people**

Many of the young people we work with are particularly vulnerable due to age and circumstances and many are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Many young people who are at risk of homelessness do not have a family support network and are at a higher risk of suffering from issues including drugs, abuse, unemployment, poor mental health, poor physical health, being involved in the criminal justice system, and being the victims of domestic violence.

It has been proven that young people who lived in suitable, permanent accommodation are more likely to experience stability, employment, develop positive relationships and establish a healthy lifestyle. However, there is limited stock of suitable housing in Scotland. The options for accommodation for homeless young people are supported accommodation with 24 hour staff, temporary furnished accommodation and a permanent tenancy (unfurnished). The most supported accommodation are the most costly and young people who are in employment or who are on training find it difficult to not to fall into arrears.

Permanent accommodation is usually unfurnished but there is an opportunity for a young person with limited funds to apply for a Community Care Grant. However, Barnardo's Scotland have identified several significant issues with such grants. Applicants are often waiting too long, as accommodation must be secured before application, leaving many young people living in empty flats while waiting for funds. A large number of applications are rejected but then the decision is overturned on appeal, indicating that proper consideration was not given in the first instance. The funds available have also been reduced and it is getting increasingly difficult to furnish a home to a basic standard. There are no safeguarding mechanisms for vulnerable groups so young people living independently for the first time may not understand how to budget and could use the fund incorrectly without guidance. Barnardo's Scotland has made the following recommendations which could be incorporated into the reformed social fund:

1. The Community Care Grant to be replaced with a similar grant that supports people setting up and staying in homes.
2. The system should allow applicants to apply for the grant prior to securing accommodation. Successful applicants would receive their grant on receipt of the keys to their accommodation to ensure no waiting time.
3. The application and approvals process for the new grant scheme should ensure that applicants are not unnecessarily rejected or systematically forced to go down the route of appeal.
4. Rules and criteria should be clear and consistently applied across Scotland.
5. That grant awards are of a sufficient level to allow applicants to properly furnish a home.

Another problem resulting from providing poor quality housing for young people is that they are less likely to treat social housing as a home. This leaves such accommodation vulnerable to abandonment, or losing the accommodation because of using the housing to facilitate anti social. The quality of accommodation available also concerns Barnardo's. This includes accommodation in undesirable areas for vulnerable groups where they can be exposed to crime, drugs and anti social behaviour. Or this could simply be that the only accommodation available is in an unfamiliar area away from any support networks. Practical considerations specifically for care leavers are discussed below.

**We believe that the current mechanism for providing social housing to young people is not fit for purpose and contributes to the high number of homeless young people in Scotland. The Welfare Reform Bill may give the Scottish Government the opportunity to make improvements in areas such as the Community Care Grant and ensuring that housing is suitable for the tenants needs.**

### **Welfare reforms and changes in housing**

The Welfare Reform Bill is implementing significant changes to housing benefit in Scotland and we are concerned that the serious impact that this will have on care leavers has not been fully taken into account. We would particularly highlight two areas that will potentially have an impact on youth homelessness: the change from increasing benefits and allowances by CPI and the reduction of housing benefit in cases of under-occupancy. Regarding homelessness in young people we are anxious that.

The levels of Local Housing Allowance inflation will be measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) instead of using the current method of using a sample of local private rents. This is planned to start coming into force in 2013. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) predicts that the problem with using CPI is that it prevents linking benefit to local movements in rents. In its inflation figure, CPI incorporates only a small element of rental costs and historically this has fallen well below private rental inflation. Consequently, it could result in a geographical disparity as rents move at varying speeds in different areas, meaning Universal credit could be worth more in some areas and price UC recipients in other areas out of the rental market.

In the private sector there is a significant lack of 1-bedroom properties – 44% of working age Housing Association or Housing Co-op tenants need only a one-bedroom property but only 24% occupy one. Across all tenants, 62% only require one bedroom but only 34% have single bedroom properties. This represents chronic under-supply. This could be an obstacle when the Government penalises those who under-occupy housing by reducing their housing benefits. Often under-occupancy is a result of a limited housing stock both in the private and social rented sectors. The SFHA also predicts that we will see a slowing down of housing allocations, with the under-occupancy criteria discouraging some young, single

people and couples from accepting a two-bedroom property. Slower allocations may discourage some young people from forming new households, and as a result affect waiting lists for homeless people to get a tenancy. Young people will be unsettled and have no option but to live in temporary accommodation or with friends. This makes young people hard to track and maintain links with support networks.

While many young people will live with their parents for longer, this is not an option for many young homeless people who are homeless because they have had to leave the family home. Alternatively, young people will have to be supported by the Local Authority in temporary accommodation which will be more expensive than the housing benefit necessary maintain a permanent tenancy and does not provide a long term solution.

**Young people are also a group most likely to have changing circumstances (e.g. pregnancy, employment, moving out from a parental home or care). This means that they will be among the first groups to be switched from existing benefits to universal credit, and we therefore fear that some of our society's most vulnerable people will become 'guinea pigs' for the new system.**

### **Care leavers vulnerability to becoming homeless**

As a vulnerable group care leavers cannot be put into just any available accommodation. The majority of care leavers are 16 and are still very young and often at risk. Therefore, there needs to be a practical assessment of any potential properties. For example, Barnardo's have previously turned down tenancies for care leavers because of a lack of quality or suitability.

In Barnardo's experience Bed and Breakfasts are often used as temporary accommodation and as demonstrated in the attached case study can be detrimental to the young person's welfare. We would argue they are rarely suitable accommodation, even on a short term basis..

Care leavers are also susceptible to poor budget management and the single Universal payment, if managed badly through inexperience, could put care leavers into serious trouble, such as rent arrears. Care leavers with the support from their after care worker should be able to negotiate more regular payments for their most vulnerable clients who are unable to manage money and who are dealing with complex mental health and substance misuse issues.

**It is worrying that care leavers are already a group with priority access to social housing and there is still a shortfall in meeting their needs. A lack of suitable accommodation that is available to young care leavers could impact their health, welfare and reduce their chances of moving into education, employment or training.**

### **Pro active preventative spend**

Only 37% of Scottish care leavers are in further education, training or employment. Therefore, this is a target area for preventative spend,. Preventative spend on aftercare services to increase employability, education and training as well as supporting access to suitable accommodation is needed to reduce the number of care leavers in receipt of benefits, and to support transitional living accommodation schemes such as Barnardo's Lothian Supported Carers Scheme.

### **Case study at a Barnardo's service**

Please see the attached case study.

We are available and willing to provide more detailed information or evidence as the current and predicted homelessness problem with young people in Scotland. Barnardo's welcomes the opportunity to raise our concerns regarding this issue and urge the Scottish Government to make care leavers a priority on the homelessness agenda.

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