



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Consultation Response Form

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Questions

Q1 The Action Plan is split into four key areas of focus (Partnerships, Rare, Brief and Non-recurring). Do you agree that these are the right areas of focus / themes to focus the plan around?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Partly

Please explain why you consider the areas of focus / themes are right or if you think a different approach is needed?

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities. We currently run more than 60 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with local authorities. Each year we regularly support more than 10,000 children, young people and families. In our response to this consultation, we will predominantly focus on the Homelessness Action Plan as it relates to care leavers and vulnerable families, as this is where our expertise lies.

In the UK, young people on average now live in their family home until the age of 23. Yet when it comes to the highly vulnerable in our society – those who have been in foster care or a children's home, the expectation is that young people start to live independently at 18, or in some cases even younger. This creates a clear need for designated tailored support for care leavers.¹ Barnardo's Cymru believes that Welsh Government must take action to ensure better outcomes for the most vulnerable young people in our society; how homelessness is tackled is a major part of this.

Barnardo's Cymru broadly agrees with the four themes of the action plan. However, we believe that there should be enhanced focus on the

¹ No Place Like Home: a look at young people's experiences of leaving the care system
<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/No-Place-Like-Home-Report-IKEA.pdf>

intersection of homelessness and other key attributes such as care leavers and vulnerable children, young people and families.

25% of the homeless population are estimated to have been in care.² This demonstrates the need for care-experienced young people to be given the right support when transitioning to adulthood. Whilst we note the references that the action plan makes to supporting care leavers, there should be more of a focus and recognition that care leavers have a specific set of experiences and therefore particular support needs.

There are a number of points that we would make about each of the themes:

Partnerships; We welcome the recognition that homelessness is about much more than just housing, an approach that Barnardo's Cymru takes in the support that we provide to vulnerable families and young people. We would welcome more detail on how Welsh Government intends to work with and draw upon the expertise of voluntary and third sector organisations that provide essential services to prevent homelessness, and work to resolve issues where they do present.

In *Hidden Ambitions: Wales' Commitment to Young People Leaving Care*, the Children's Commissioner for Wales recommended that social services, housing and education all work together in order to plan a young person's move to living independently.³ However, in the review of these recommendations a year later in 2018, it was still unclear how these services were working together.⁴ For young people to have confidence in the service, and for partnership working to be successful, this should be made clearer.

In light of the recognition that homelessness is an issue that is about much more than housing, Barnardo's Cymru recommends that Welsh Government engage directly with those organisations working with people at risk of or experiencing homelessness on what holistic actions should be taken. Care leavers, for example, need support that takes a whole-person approach. For example, Barnardo's Cymru would recommend that, given the higher risk of homelessness for care leavers, this group of young people be given free bus and train travel up until the age of 25. This has the potential to make housing placements more successful as care leavers often report feeling isolated if they are removed from their support networks when they are offered housing away from their current area. By moving care leavers out of area, a financial barrier is created to

² Cardiff University and Crisis (2014) 'Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain'. Available at: [crisis_nations_apart_2014.pdf](https://www.crisis-nations-apart-2014.pdf)

³ <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hidden-Ambitions.pdf>

⁴ *Hidden Ambitions: One Year On* <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Hidden-Ambitions-A-follow-up-report-on-local-authorities%E2%80%99-progress-and-good-practice-in-supporting-care-leavers.pdf>

maintaining a person's wellbeing, as the financial cost of public transport is often cited by children and young people within Barnardo's Cymru services as prohibitive. Welsh Government should be seeking to remove these barriers at every opportunity and look for solutions that are not always primarily housing-based to help ensure that housing placements are as successful as possible. This should form part of a well-rounded care leavers offer, which supports every part of their life as they transition to adulthood.

Rare; More clarity should be given for what is meant by 'smoothing pathways' for care leavers and other vulnerable children. More detail on what this means in practice would create certainty and confidence in the plan from the communities that it seeks to serve.

We would argue that there should be dedicated support for young people that recognises the challenges and experiences that they face, to ensure that homelessness is a rare occurrence. This plan does not outline how it intends to interact with other Welsh Government interventions such as the Programme for Government commitment to 'explore radical reform of current services for looked after children and care leavers.' Similarly, given that Welsh Government has pledged to legislate by the end of this Senedd term for care leavers to be given a personal advisor up to the age of 25, which Barnardo's Cymru supports, there should be better integration of how the homelessness strategy will interact with this pledge, including appropriate practitioner training for those supporting care leavers to begin living independently.

We welcome the commitment to ensure that actions to reduce child poverty and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are aligned with homelessness prevention policy and practice.

Brief; We would also like to see recognition of the increased dangers facing children and vulnerable young people as a result of homelessness such as criminal and sexual abuse and exploitation and domestic abuse, and the long-term consequences where this does take place.

We welcome the recognition that more can be done to identify young people at risk of homelessness and to promote better preventative work and Barnardo's Cymru would seek to support Welsh Government in developing this aim.

Non-recurring; We welcome the commitment to rapid rehousing and the housing-first approach. Locally, our services report that this does work, but properties are scarce and waiting lists are long. It has been reported that some local authorities have closed their waiting lists because of this.

In England and Scotland, Barnardo's has experienced positive examples such as Gap Homes⁵. This is where local authority brown field sites of disused small plots of land in residential areas have purpose-built care leaver homes built on them. The young people live their over 12 months transitioning into full independence. We have apprenticeships provided in construction through Sant Gobain. This could be a good model for Wales.

Q2 Do the actions in the Action Plan reflect the most effective high level steps that will enable the Welsh Government and its partners to end homelessness in Wales?

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

☐ **Partly**

How can they be improved?

We are pleased to see the commitment to placing individuals at the centre of the plan, and to working in a trauma-informed way. This is crucial for care leavers and other vulnerable young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

We also welcome the recognition that homelessness is about far more than housing. This is particularly the case for care leavers, 39% of whom are not in education, training or employment at age 19-21.⁶ This demonstrates the need to look holistically at how young people leaving care can be supported into adulthood.

Barnardo's Cymru would like to see a greater emphasis on education and support within the plan, providing care leavers and vulnerable young adults with the tools to help protect them from the risk of homelessness. This should include an emphasis on training, education, and skills. This would include support on budgeting, financial planning and understanding the benefits system and other means of support that are available to them. Many of these are implemented by Barnardo's Cymru services to support care leavers into independence and financial security.

In addition to intervening comprehensively, we should also look for more opportunities to intervene early. We would recommend that care leavers be offered financial education in schools and at any other point that can prevent a problem before it becomes a crisis in a young person's life.

⁵ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/barnardos-scotland-blog-filling-gap-care-leavers>

⁶ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/No-Place-Like-Home-Report-IKEA.pdf>

Again, the pledge to provide care leavers with a personal adviser up to the age of 25 should provide the opportunity to equip care leavers with more of the support that they need when transitioning into living independently.

Barnardo's Cymru services working with families report that as practitioners, they are forced to look for a 'quick fix' for families who are on the edge of a crisis because the forms and paperwork required to access support are not as accessible as they could be and are difficult to navigate. Practitioners raised the need to take a whole-person approach to dealing with homelessness that considers mental health, background, the challenges that an individual faces alongside any other issues that may make it more difficult for that person to interact with housing.

Practitioners also stated that they were concerned about the impact of the coming months on the young people and families that they support. The cumulative impact of the removal of the Universal Credit uplift, the rise in energy bills, food bank usage and the wider economic outlook that is expected to put increased pressure on household budgets that could ultimately be unsustainable for some of our most vulnerable young people and families, potentially resulting in more people falling into homelessness.

We are pleased to see a commitment from Welsh Government to co-production of advice and support and would urge them to ensure that the voice of care leavers and vulnerable young people are heard throughout policy making. The Swansea Youth Homeless Charter is a good example of policy that was co-produced and has had a positive impact in its implementation.

Q3 Does the Action Plan align with other relevant areas of policy and practice?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Partly

Please explain why it aligns well or outline how it could be made better?

Barnardo's Cymru believes that there should be more interaction between the homelessness action plan and the support available to care leavers.

Firstly, as noted above, we would be interested to see in what ways Welsh Government expects the Homelessness Action Plan to interact with Welsh

Government's commitment to legislate during this Senedd term for every care leaver to have a personal advisor up to the age of 25. This policy should have the potential to significantly impact upon the experiences of care leavers as they transition into adulthood, particularly with regards to housing and preventing homelessness. This initiative should include appropriate practitioner training to ensure that a whole-person approach to support is successful.

Furthermore, the Homelessness Action Plan should also be considered in light of Welsh Government's commitment to a Universal Basic Income pilot for care leavers and the impact this could and should have on the ability of care leavers to live independently. As we have stated elsewhere in this consultation response, we believe that there should be wrap around support for individuals in receipt of UBI under the pilot to be supported with budgeting and financial stability. It is vital that financial support available to care leavers is as joined up as possible to prevent, wherever possible, young people falling through the cracks and becoming homeless.

We welcome the recognition of barriers related to equality, and the discrimination and marginalisation that particular groups are more likely to experience. However, we would welcome more clarity on how this action plan intends to interact with the Race Equality Action Plan, Disability Action Plan and other Welsh Government policy interventions in this area. In addition to this, we would like to see more interaction with the LGBTQ+ Action Plan given that LGBTQ+ young people are a vulnerable group specifically.

Q4 We have developed a number of key actions and milestones. Do you feel these are the right ones?

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

☐ **Partly**

Q5 Do you think there are any key areas for action not captured by the high level actions? If so, what would they be?

Please provide additional comments

One area of concern raised by Barnardo's Cymru practitioners is that whilst there are pots of funding available to support vulnerable people, such as the Innovation Fund and the Youth Support Fund the downfall is that this

is year-to-year funding. To build long-term, effective solutions, services must be able to think in the long-term, which is made difficult by the funding arrangements in place. Long-term funding is critical for tackling the root causes of homelessness.

With regards to issues such as the workforce framework, this only works fully where there is accountability for it being utilised. To date, this is encouraged in guidance only and therefore has a limited impact. Barnardo's Cymru would welcome more clarity and accountability for this to be used more widely.

Q6 We would like to know your views on the effects that the Ending Homelessness Action Plan would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Barnardo's Cymru would like to see more support for services to be provided bilingually, so that vulnerable families, children and young people can be supported in the language that they feel most comfortable using.

Q7 Please also explain how you believe the proposed plan could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Q8 We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them: