

Local Government and Communities Committee

Homelessness

Submission from Action for Children Scotland

Dear Convener

Committee call for evidence on Homelessness

I am writing to provide Action for Children's submission as part of your committee's call for evidence regarding homelessness. Before we lay out our points to the key areas of interest for the committee, I would like to tell you about the work that Action for Children does in providing vulnerable young people with housing support. We would also like to share some of the reasons we have found that contribute to homelessness.

About Action for Children Scotland

Action for Children Scotland works with more than 14,000 children, young people, parents and carers each year. With more than 80 services across Scotland, we are in communities where you live and work. We help transform the lives of thousands of children and young people each year and we have been doing so for 60 years. For more information, visit actionforchildren.org.uk or follow us on Twitter @actn4childrScot.

Key Messages on Homelessness from Action for Children

- Action for Children provides a range of housing support services to over 500 vulnerable young people and families across Scotland.
- Based on the recording information, and the knowledge and experience of our staff, we have identified a range of challenges that often lead to a young person becoming homeless.
- Action for Children calls for housing providers to work more with the third sector to deliver housing options and prevention work. This would help reduce the number of young people in temporary or unsuitable accommodation and ensure their actual needs are addressed faster.
- Investment is also required to deal with the range of multiple and complex challenges identified such as mental health and family breakdown that need to be addressed first before young people can secure affordable and suitable accommodation.
- Making use of early intervention programmes as in Dundee or 'supported flats' as in West Lothian will allow a multi-agency approach to be taken to improve the housing support made available to young people.

- Reviewing housing benefit legislation to make sure young people in education and employment are not being disadvantaged.

How Action for Children works to provide housing support

Action for Children provides a range of housing support services to over 500 vulnerable young people and families across Scotland. This includes in areas such as Aberdeen City, Dundee, Glasgow, East Lothian, West Lothian, East Dunbartonshire and West Dunbartonshire. **Annex A** provides a table, which outlines what each of our housing support services, do and the impact they have in supporting vulnerable young people who find themselves homeless.

What Action for Children has identified as being the reasons causing homelessness

When young people seek assistance from Action for Children, we try to identify the challenges they may be facing when they present themselves for support. Often, there are numerous challenges they face in addition requiring help to find suitable accommodation. Based on the recorded information, and the knowledge and experience of our staff, we have identified the following challenges that often lead to a young person becoming homeless:

- Family / Relationship Breakdown
- Unemployment
- Mental Health
- Substance misuse
- Childhood trauma
- Previous lifestyle choices
- Inadequate life and survival skills (cooking, money management etc.)
- Affordability
- Violence
- Overcrowding
- Money Pressures
- No family support network
- Previously looked after at home or looked after in care
- Gaps in services which are not aligned
- Young people not knowing their housing options and rights
- Lack of safe and appropriate accommodation
- Inability to manage a tenancy due to knowledge and skills gap
- Adult hostels not suitable accommodation for young people and so do not provide adequate support for them to move on

Action for Children notes that the above range of issues are very complex in themselves and can become even more so when placed in a housing context. In a bid to break what can become a never-ending cycle, it is essential that central and local government, along with the third sector and business works together to try to address some of the underlying issues that can lead to homelessness. Action for Children's services are actively working to support young people to manage these

issues. For example, Dundee Housing Support helps to resolve family conflict and East Lothian New Horizons supports young people with independent living.

Housing Options and Homeless Prevention

Our services have recorded evidence of the impact of housing options and prevention work in reducing homelessness. For example, in Dundee, our work saw a reduction of 35 percent of young people presenting as homeless in the last year. Action for Children also deliver the Housing Education for Youth Programme in Dundee. This is an **early intervention, homeless prevention programme** for 15 and 16 year olds. Action for Children coordinates the programme through Dundee secondary schools and is delivered in partnership with other third sector and statutory agencies.

Temporary Accommodation

For young adults who are in education or in employment, there is often a lack of temporary accommodation. Due to **existing housing benefit legislation**, young people in education and or employment are not entitled to access support for covering rent and support costs. This has resulted in a number of young people having to sofa surf long-term or sleep in cars. Therefore, putting themselves at further risk.

Action for Children believes that young people should not be placed in adult hostels and that housing options and prevention work should be prioritised instead so that safe and suitable accommodation can be found for them. If temporary accommodation has to be used, it has to be appropriate for young people to be placed there.

There are examples of a number of providers working together through the provision of accommodation and support to meet young people's needs. In West Lothian, this approach enables young people to live in supported flats provided by the Rock Trust, Open Doors, and receive outreach support from Action for Children to ensure they have the time to learn the skills to sustain their own tenancy.

Multiple and Complex Needs

The young people that Action for Children support are often in crisis. They present a range of multiple and complex needs (as seen in the list above) which should be addressed before they can be successful in securing affordable, good quality housing.

Many young people who receive housing support have multiple and complex needs. Funding within housing support does not readily enable providers' flexibility to increase staffing levels or staff qualifications. Action for Children have used creative approaches to enhance staffing levels and training to better support young people. However, we have done so within financial constraints.

Investment is also required in services and staff who respond to the multiple and complex needs such as mental health, family breakdown, money management, and

problematic substance use. Having a central, localised, database of services would be helpful to make connections and avoid duplication. This would need to be backed by multi-agency training for all staff involved so that can better understand what others are doing or can offer to support young homeless people.

Action for Children's services also highlight the increasing need for more support workers to be trained in trauma to assist homeless young people with multiple and complex needs.

Affordable and Suitable Accommodation

A lack of housing stock that is either affordable or suitable for single people can be a barrier especially when younger people try to move on from supported accommodation. This can delay their transitional plans as a consequence. The private rented sector offers a good alternative to the social rented sector for families. However, with regard to young people, there is an issue of affordability and the current benefit regulations restrict the amount of benefit entitlement so are unable to afford access to this sector.

I trust that this will assist the committee in its work and investigations.

Yours sincerely

Paul Carberry
Director, Action for Children Scotland

Annex A: How Action for Children works to provide housing support

The table below outlines what each of Action for Children's housing support services do and the impact they have in supporting vulnerable young people who find themselves homeless:

Action for Children Service Name	Description	Impact
Alexandria Prep for Life Housing Service	Provides group living accommodation to support young people who are homeless. Each young person receives individual support to address their needs and build the skills required to manage a tenancy independently.	Currently supports 10 young people. Many of our young people present to the service more than once. We currently have one young person who is now on his fifth stay with us. We have worked hard with him and his throughcare worker to ensure that his stay this time has been more positive. He now works for a hotel in the local area and has clear plans for the future. He has been allocated a tenancy that he has now moved into.
Clifton Road	<p>A residential service offering supported accommodation to 10 young people, male and female, aged between 16 and 21 years. All of whom have been previously looked after.</p> <p>Clifton Road Service has a contract for delivery of this throughcare service with Aberdeen City Council (ACC) and the service works closely with ACC's Social Work department and other local agencies to ensure a comprehensive and relevant service is being delivered.</p>	Looked After Young People have increased difficulties to cope with – disrupted schooling, low self-esteem, emotional difficulties, substance misuse issues, challenging behaviour etc. - and this means they may find it harder to achieve personal aspirations and manage their own tenancies. The service aims to address this and supports young people in overcoming these difficulties and being better equipped to manage their own lives successfully and live independently in the community.
Dundee Housing Options	Partnership service with Dundee City Council and Positive Steps, which is the first point of contact for all 16-25-year-olds who present as homeless. The service has a prevention focus and provides conflict resolution and targeted interventions to support young people to remain within the family home where possible or to access suitable accommodation.	The service prevents homelessness and reduces the numbers of young people accessing temporary accommodation. Conflict resolution enables young people and their families to repair and rebuild relationships and provides tools for them to assist when they encounter difficulties within their relationships.
Dundee Youth Housing Service	Provision of temporary supported accommodation to 16-21-year-old homeless young people who present with multiple and complex needs. The service provides a person centred and holistic approach to meeting individual needs and supporting young people to learn necessary skills and have confidence in living independently.	The service enables young people to try out living independently within a safe and nurturing environment, where mistakes can be made and learned from. The assessment of need and risk enables the service to assist and support young people with multiple and complex needs to access specialist services in relation to issues such as mental health and substance misuse.
East Dunbartonshi	Working in partnership with the local authority, we offer six homeless young	Two of our young people have secured posts through the Community Job Scotland with a

<p>re Canal Housing Service</p>	<p>people and 2 young people leaving the care system accommodation within a shared living residential housing support service.</p> <p>Each young person has an individual plan to address their support needs and build the skills required to manage a tenancy individually. A key part of their care plans is to work in partnership with a range of agencies(education/employment/training/ health) to ensure the best outcomes for young people. AFC supports them to gain the skills and confidence to make the transition and sustain their own tenancy.</p>	<p>number accessing training and college placements. Similarly, two of our young people have returned to school to complete their education.</p> <p>A key feature of the support offered is to encourage parents to get involved with the project and build relationships with their children. This is having a positive impact on relationships with two young people aged (16 and 17) working towards reintegrating back into the family home.</p>
<p>East Lothian New Horizons Housing Service</p>	<p>East Lothian New Horizons Housing Service is supported accommodation for young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who are homeless.</p> <p>New Horizons offers accommodation for 11 young people. Nine have a bedroom and share communal facilities in the main house and a further two sharing a two-bedroom flat in the same grounds.</p> <p>Young people are supported to prepare for independent living, with their practical skills, emotional wellbeing and any other areas of support that may have an impact on them moving into and sustaining a tenancy.</p> <p>Young people are also supported to make the transition into independent living, with money raised at Byte Night (AFC Fundraising Event) going directly to buying young people move on packs, white goods, providing an initial payment for gas or electricity, and voucher for food.</p>	<p>Young People have transition to independent living and their ability to sustain that is partly due to the work we have done, and through the continued financial support of Byte Night funding. This allows cooking and budgeting sessions to take place with every young person who uses the service.</p>
<p>Glasgow Gen R 8 Housing Service</p>	<p>The service provides outreach-housing support in the community to 100 young people each year in North East Glasgow and citywide for care leavers.</p> <p>The aim is to allow them to access secure accommodation, primary health services and benefits through tailored 1:1 support, which is delivered by a staff team of 10, working in partnership with a range of external agencies. We do so to prevent</p>	<p>Gen R 8 has received 99 new referrals since January 2016 and 25 young people gained their own tenancy.</p> <p>They have accessed over £16,000 funding which has helped 49 young people source furniture and essential household items.</p> <p>Gen R 8 have also been able to support young people to apply for funding through Barclaycard's Best Foot Forward programme. Since January</p>

	<p>rootlessness among 16 to 24 years olds including young parents, prevent eviction and improve wellbeing.</p>	<p>2016, 27 young people have received nearly £8,000. The funding is for people aged 16 – 35 who are finding finance a barrier to either securing employment, training or further education or sustaining the positions they have secured. The programme ends in June 2017.</p>
<p>West Lothian Outreach Housing Support</p>	<p>To help prevent homelessness or repeat homelessness by working with young people up to the age of 25. Helping them independently manage their tenancy or sustain their place in the family home.</p>	<p>Evidence from calls made to young people three months after they leave the service is that the majority are still in their tenancy or in the family home.</p>