



Public Affairs Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Northern Ireland

Submission of evidence by Action for Children in Northern Ireland

December 2025

1. Action for Children in Northern Ireland

- 1.1. Action for Children is one of the largest voluntary children's services providers. We have operated in Northern Ireland (NI) for 25 years. We run services supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, supported accommodation and a regional fostering service.
- 1.2. We believe all young people should have a safe, stable and loving home and that young people in care should be supported to transition to independent living.
- 1.3. Thank you for allowing us to comment in relation to the Committee's inquiry into homelessness in NI. Our response is based upon our experience as service providers in this area.

2. Homelessness amongst young people

- 2.1. For many young people in NI their right to adequate housing is not being fulfilled. We see this across our services. Young people leaving foster care or supported accommodation are struggling to find suitable accommodation resulting in many having to present as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). Our floating support service is seeing long waiting lists for social housing and a lack of temporary housing suitable for young people.

- 2.2. Homelessness is a complex and multi-faceted issue and there are many factors which can lead to young people finding themselves without a safe place to stay, isolated from support and in need of temporary accommodation.
- 2.3. Being homeless or in insecure housing can impact a young person's family connections, social life, access and experience of education and employment and physical and mental health and wellbeing. Homelessness can also increase the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system. It can lead to long term poor outcomes for young people.
- 2.4. A clear strategic focus on prevention with adequate funding is needed to improve outcomes for young people. This should deliver targeted support for those most at risk of homelessness. As the causes and consequences of youth homelessness span the housing, health, education and justice sectors strong cross-departmental co-operation is critical.
- 2.5. With a strong focus on prevention, wrap around services and therapeutic interventions and affordable, appropriate accommodation homelessness can be prevented and young people supported into independent living.
- 2.6. We would make the following points for consideration.

3. Support for families

- 3.1. The best form of prevention is upstream, long before people reach homelessness. Increased investment in support for families both to prevent family breakdown and to identify and support young people at risk of homelessness is essential.

4. A transition pathway for care leavers

- 4.1. Recent research by ADRUK has shown that carer leavers in NI face a substantially higher risk of homelessness than their peers who have no social care history¹.
- 4.2. Young people in care need early, coordinated, and sustained support during the transition out of care into adulthood to reduce homelessness and improve outcomes.
- 4.3. Our experience, as service providers, is that there is a “cliff edge” for care experienced children once they legally become adults. There have been some steps to address this – like the Going the Extra Mile (GEM) Scheme for foster carers – to help bridge the transition until age 21 but it is not enough.
- 4.4. The GEM Scheme is not being applied consistently across NI. There is not sufficient professional engagement with young people and foster carers in its assessment and administration. It is in urgent need of review and update in advance of being put on a statutory footing under section 128 of the Adoption and Children Act (NI) 2022 (commencement still pending).
- 4.5. Care experienced children have faced trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that impact them deeply. The age on their birth certificate is just a chronological number, developmentally they are often much younger and reach “life milestones” later than their peers.
- 4.6. However despite the challenges care experienced young people have faced in their formative years, care experience is not a protected characteristic when it comes to the housing system.

¹ [Data Insight: Homelessness among young people leaving care in Northern Ireland - ADR UK](#)

- 4.7. There is also a lack of single tenancies which are suitable for young people in Northern Ireland.
- 4.8. Within our service we have seen foster carers take radical steps to support young people – from using savings to pay for a deposit on a flat to buying a caravan for their driveway for the young person.
- 4.9. Recognition of care experience as a priority group for housing support, better collaboration between all agencies and a clear transition pathway with targeted support would significantly improve the experience of young people transitioning out of care.
- 4.10. Better planning would also help. The numbers of young people in care are known. It should therefore be possible to map the number of young people approaching age 18 in coming years with available accommodation and take appropriate action to ensure demand matches supply.
- 4.11. The New Foundations Programme, launched in December 2025, is a welcome collaboration between health and communities. The aspiration of the programme to “support young people leaving care and help prevent homelessness” by providing a “ holistic approach with practical support and personal guidance for young people as they leave the care system” and a “ housing-led pilot, which will provide ‘Housing First’ accommodation to young people leaving the care system” will hopefully address some of the issues we raise above. However at the time of writing we have yet to see details of how this ambition will become reality.

5. Social housing options for young people

- 5.1. Across our services we see inadequate social housing provision for young people. There is a lack of single tenancies in the centre of towns or villages or near transport routes, close to young people’s social networks, education and employment. This is especially evident in rural areas.

- 5.2. The lack of social housing options can result in young people being placed in temporary accommodation for extended periods of time, isolated from support.
- 5.3. Young people moving out of supported accommodation can also find themselves housed in temporary accommodation. This risks undoing the progress towards independent living which the young person has made within the supported accommodation.
- 5.4. It is essential that the planned expansion of social housing under Programme for Government targets includes adequate single occupancy social housing options in areas close to young people's education, employment and social support networks.
- 5.5. This also needs to be included in the urban planning and regeneration plans, particularly in urban areas.

6. Temporary accommodation for young people

- 6.1. The audit office recommendation that NIHE should continue to seek ways to minimise its reliance on hotel and B&B accommodation and reduce its spending on this type of accommodation is welcome.
- 6.2. Temporary accommodation is expensive and inefficient use of public money.
- 6.3. In the interim ensuring temporary housing is safe, stable and located near essential services, transport networks, education and employment, as well as near young people's support networks would greatly reduce the negative impact.

7. Earlier intervention and statutory responsibility for prevention of homelessness

- 7.1. Extending the period of time under which the NIHE has a legal obligation to support people threatened with homelessness to 6 months (rather than the current 28 days) would provide a more realistic and humane timeframe for young people facing homelessness to access support, find alternative accommodation, and avoid falling into crisis.
- 7.2. The longer prevention window would allow for a more proactive, person centred approach to homelessness, focusing on early intervention rather than crisis management. For 16-18 year olds in care and approaching leaving care/moving to independent living, this would enable housing support to become engaged at a much earlier stage.
- 7.3. Ensuring the Housing Executive has a statutory duty to prevent homelessness would give greater weight to prevention and earlier intervention and hopefully better funding streams to support this work.
- 7.4. The Children's Co-operation Act should provide framework for Government departments to work together to tackle homelessness, including through shared budgets, however it is currently underutilised.
- 7.5. The funding and working arrangements between HSC Trusts and Supporting People/NIHE and the Departments of Health and Communities needs to be much more integrated and seamless, particularly in commissioning and oversight of services/provision.

8. Better collaboration and funding

- 8.1. Better collaboration between statutory organisations such as NIHE and Trusts could lead to improved and more efficient commissioning of services and more consistent reporting for providers.
- 8.2. Multi-year budgets will allow for better planning and delivery of services.
- 8.3. However increased funding for prevention, supported accommodation and social housing is required to scale up and deliver on the issues we have raised above.
- 8.4. Additional funding is also required to provide wellbeing support to young people at risk of or homeless. Action for Children have utilised other funding routes to provide this support across some of our services and have seen the benefits to young people.

9. Action for Children's Services

Rossorry Grove

This is a purpose built 13 apartment supported accommodation in Enniskillen. The service works with young people aged 16 to 21 years, many of whom have been in care. Each young person has their own self-contained flat and staff work closely with young people to support the development of independent living skills and enable them to move safely into the community.

Sperrin and Lakeland Floating Support Service

The service assists young people, aged 16 to 24 years, who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Using a person centred approach the supports each person requires is identified and provided. For example housing support and advice, emotional support and signposting, benefits advice and practical

support i.e. filling in application forms. The team work in partnership with young people and, where appropriate, their families, employers, and other organisations.

Fostering Service

The regional fostering service provides foster homes for children and young people aged 0 to 18 years for varying periods of time – from just one day to a lifetime. Support for young people leaving care through the GEM Scheme is a key feature of Action for Children’s fostering service, with young people frequently experiencing integration into the foster family or long term emotional and practical support.

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