

Call for evidence: The Housing (Amendment) Bill

Introduction

The Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) was created in accordance with 'The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order' (2003) to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Under Articles 7(2) and (3) of this legislation, NICCY has a mandate to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services relating to the rights and best interests of children and young people by relevant authorities. Under Article 7(4), NICCY has a statutory duty to advise any relevant authority on matters concerning the rights or best interests of children and young persons. The Commissioner's remit includes children and young people up to 18 years, or 21 years if the young person is disabled or is care experienced.

In carrying out his functions, the Commissioner's paramount consideration is the rights of the child or young person, having particular regard to their wishes and feelings. In exercising his functions, the Commissioner has regard to all relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Housing (Amendment) Bill

NICCY welcomes the opportunity to submit information to the Committee for Communities' Call for Evidence on the Housing (Amendment) Bill.

NICCY supports the intent of the legislation which is to extend the time period under which the NI Housing Executive (NIHE) has a legal obligation to support people threatened with homelessness from within 28 days to within 60 days by amending the definition of 'threatened with homelessness' in the Housing (NI) Order 1988.

Any extension of the current 28-day period is welcome, but it should also be met with adequate availability of resources, information, support assistance and guidance. Housing support should also continue further to a tenancy being secured, particularly for those who need additional assistance in sustaining a tenancy, or who have additional support needs to live independently. NICCY appreciates the need to extend the 28-day period, and support the intent of the proposals, however wish to press that adequate investment in local services is required to combat this along with a clear need for more social housing.

NICCY does have concerns about the potential impact that has been outlined within the Bill's explanatory notes, that it could lead to 'an increased number of people being housed in non-standard accommodation, such as hotels and B&Bs, whilst also placing a greater financial strain on the NIHE's limited resources'. NICCY has previously raised concerns about the use of non-standard accommodation for children, young people and their families and the length of use. In the 'A Place to Call Home: A rights-based approach to understanding the lived experience of children and families facing

homelessness or housing insecurity’ research, 13 recommendations were made, a number of which we consider relevant to this Bill and have been highlighted below for the Committee’s attention:

1. The Department for Communities (DfC) and NIHE must work to ensure that there is adequate provision of housing for children, young people and families, including accommodation tailored to the needs of young people.
2. The NIHE must ensure that all accommodation allocated to children, young people and families (including temporary accommodation and social housing) is maintained to an appropriate standard.
3. Trusts must never house young people under the age of 18 in bed and breakfast accommodation.
4. The NIHE must ensure that temporary accommodation provided to families must be of an adequate standard to enable the realisation of children’s rights, including their rights to family life, privacy, education, health, play, leisure and social engagement (e.g. friends and peers). Families must only be placed in temporary accommodation for the shortest time possible. This is also the case for asylum seeking families provided accommodation by the Home Office.
5. The NIHE must work with housing providers and Policing and Community Safety Partnerships in every council area to ensure that all tenants feel safe in the communities that they live. This should include young people in hostel or B&B accommodation.
6. Statutory agencies should cooperate with each other and with voluntary organisations to provide holistic services to meet the assessed needs of young people in supported and other temporary accommodation, particularly with regard to their mental health, substance misuse, as well as life skills.¹

The Children’s Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015 should be utilised by relevant agencies and authorities to ensure that families including children and young people be supported as far as possible should they be facing homelessness.

NICCY considers that particular focus should be given to the barriers and issues faced by families, and 16- and 17-year-olds, those from households experiencing domestic abuse, those from marginalised groups (including LGBTQIA+), those who are care experienced, who are at risk of homelessness and those within, and who have experience of, the refugee and asylum system. This should include ensuring what support can be given during the extended period of time meets their needs, in conjunction with the NIHE’s Youth Homelessness Action Plan 2024-27 and the Homelessness Strategy. Practical support and information on the housing system, matters like finances, access to mental health support and education should be provided, if required.

¹ NICCY, ‘A Place to Call Home: A rights based approach to understanding the lived experience of children and families facing homelessness or housing insecurity’ (2023) (Available at: [NICCY-Homelessness-A-Place-to-Call-Home-Main-Report.pdf](#))

Conclusion

In June 2025, NICCY submitted advice to the Member through the consultation in support of the proposed Private Member's Bill, a copy of which is available [here](#). Through this NICCY highlighted the key children's rights that the proposal engage with, and outlined findings from the 'A Place to Call Home' research. We encourage the Committee to consider this research, and its recommendations, in the context of scrutinising this Bill.

There should be multi-year adequate, sufficient and sustainable resources made available for the NIHE and those delivering frontline services and support to children, young people and their families. We understand that the Bill is not proposing to create a legal duty on the NIHE to prevent homelessness but continue to support the need for it in NI, alongside a myriad of other legislative and policy changes to enable the eradication of homelessness.

Should the Committee require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact NICCY via 