

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Communities

LAUNCH OF NEW FOUNDATIONS PILOT PROGRAMME

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Mr Lyons (The Minister for Communities): Today, I wish to inform the Assembly that along with Minister Nesbitt, I have given approval for officials to launch a pilot programme entitled “New Foundations”. This programme will aim to embed permanent systems change and prevent homelessness among young people leaving care.

As members will be aware, this is a specific commitment within the Programme for Government, and the launch of New Foundations will mark an important step forward in our collective mission to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurrent.

We know that those who are care-experienced are disproportionately represented in the homelessness system, including among those experiencing chronic homelessness and rough sleeping.

That is why Minister Nesbitt and I are determined to act and take a more proactive, preventative approach. Unlike many others at risk of homelessness, we know who these young people are, where they are, and when they will leave care. We also understand the barriers they are likely to encounter and the help they will need to overcome them.

That knowledge gives us a unique opportunity to shift away from what is all too often a crisis response and improve outcomes for young people as they transition out of care.

The New Foundations programme will help ensure that young people leaving care have access to, or an offer of, settled, affordable accommodation, along with the support they need to make a successful transition to independent living. This is not just about housing, it is about giving these young people the same stability, and opportunity that any of us would want for our own children.

Collaborative working is at the core of this initiative. While it is being jointly led by the Department for Communities and the Department of Health, along with the Housing Executive, the Action Plan has been developed in partnership with sectoral and statutory partners.

This reflects the reality that preventing homelessness requires a whole of government approach. The ambition is that the New Foundations programme will be a practical example of that in action, with Departments and other agencies coming together to play a vital role in supporting young people as they leave care.

We cannot continue to fail our young people. By working together, we can ensure that those leaving care are not left to face a cliff-edge, and potentially homelessness, but are instead supported to not only survive, but to thrive.