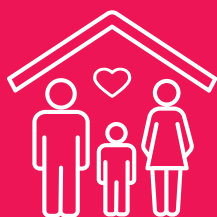




**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

Spotlight report: How housing and homelessness affects children and young people in Wales





**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**

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01 FOREWORD

by the Children's Commissioner
for Wales



"I feel like I have the bare minimum standard to what housing I would like."

These words, spoken by a child, are testament to the stark reality faced by some children living in inadequate housing in Wales, and echo the stories my team and I have heard in compiling this report.

One particularly impactful story came from a young person with care-experience, who described their time living in a tent:

"it was freezing when I woke up. I was terrified as I was right by the motorway. It was scary".

Others have shared their experiences of feeling unsafe, cramped living conditions, the negative impact on their education and mental health, living with mould and damp, the stigma of social housing, and the weight all of this can place on young shoulders; a weight no child should have to bear.



Children's rights

All children have a right to a good standard of living under article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but it's clear from my report that there are children in Wales who are being denied this fundamental need. Other rights, like a right to be safe and a right to reach their full potential, are clearly not consistent realities for many of the children we heard from.

Housing is clearly an issue that children are generally aware of too. In Autumn 2022, we launched Ambitions for Wales, our national survey of children and young people, where we heard from nearly 9,000 children and young people; housing was one of their top four concerns.

And we know through our [Children's Rights Advice](#) and Assistance Service that children and families face significant housing challenges, including:

- * Insecure or unsuitable accommodation, with families placed in temporary housing for prolonged periods.
- * Lack of adapted or accessible housing for disabled children.
- * Poor housing conditions, including damp, mould, and overcrowding, negatively impacting children's health.
- * Barriers in accessing support, where families struggle to navigate housing processes or are unaware of their rights.

As part of my [three-year strategy](#) I made a commitment to all children and young people to speak out on their behalf on issues that impact their access to their rights and to seek change.

Listening

In line with that commitment, this report shines a light on children's experiences of housing and homelessness, contributing children's voices to our national understanding of this issue for the first time.

I want to thank every child and young person who has contributed to this report through their brave and honest testimonies - some of your experiences were very difficult to share and I am extremely grateful for your time and willingness to share them. My promise to you is that we will make sure that those experiences are heard.

Having a safe and adequate place to call home are fundamental children's rights. No child in Wales should experience what we've heard from our work. There are real opportunities to change things in Wales and the Welsh Government must now consider the realities facing our children and their families by listening and delivering.

Thank you

I want to thank all the children and young people who shared their experiences with us, their parents, carers, and all the professionals we engaged with for their contributions, and for supporting and enabling the participation of children and young people in this work.



Rocio Cifuentes MBE
Children's Commissioner
for Wales



REFLECTIONS

by Bill Rowlands

Every child and young person in Wales deserve a safe place to call home. A home from which they can grow, develop and flourish. A home embedded in their community that provides them with a sense of belonging. A home that makes them feel happy.

We are very grateful to the Children's Commissioner's Office for undertaking this research and filling the crucial gap in our understanding of the importance of a home through engaging with children and exploring the effects that housing issues have upon them.

Our own work and research has demonstrated the long-term damaging effects of experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness can have upon young people aged 16-25 at such a crucial developmental period of their lives. We know that, in a sample of people experiencing homelessness in Wales, 48% had first become homeless before the age of 21, whilst of that same sample, 73% had been homeless more than once. Demonstrating the unfortunate likelihood of homelessness reoccurring.

This report shines a light on the fact that in Wales currently far too many children and young people are having to face housing insecurities, inappropriate housing and housing that is frankly unsafe.

We know the damaging effects that these experiences have on children and young people's development, and this report amplifies the voices of children and young people from across Wales and allows them to articulate their own concerns and experiences.

Perhaps the most impactful part of the report is the aspirations of the young people. The aspirations from young people reflect the aspirations from our own research entitled 'The Golden Rules of Temporary Accommodation'. From both reports, the most striking thing is how deliverable these perceived aspirations are. It is not aspirational for children and young people to want live in a home that makes them feel safe, provides comfort and is free of mould. Nor is it aspirational for young people residing in Temporary Accommodation to want accommodation that provides a lockable door, a window or access to a private shower and toilet.

This report demonstrates that there is plenty of work still to be done in Wales to ensure that we create a nation in which every child and young person grows up in a safe place to call home. Action is needed and is needed now, to ensure that we don't condemn another generation of children and young people to face similar experiences to those highlighted in this report.

Bill Rowlands

Head of End Youth Homelessness Cymru



We were on oxygen tanks for 2 hours"

14 year old young person talking about the effects of a carbon monoxide leak in their rented home.

02 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND HOUSING

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The **UNCRC** is an international human rights treaty that applies to all children and young people up to the age of 18. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places a duty on Welsh Ministers, in exercising all of their functions, to have 'due regard' to the UNCRC. The Welsh Government sets out how it meets this duty in a Children's Rights Scheme.

There are important considerations regarding children and young people in regard to housing and homelessness, which are outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These include:

Article 12: the right to say what you think should happen and be listened to.

Article 16: the right to have privacy.

Article 21: the right to live in the best place for you if you can't live with your parents.

Article 27: the right to a good standard of living.

Article 31: the right to relax and play.



I hear my brother coughing with asthma most nights, my parents can't (hear him) so I go to help him. I worry, 'What if I can't hear him and he chokes?'

14-year-old worried about impact of house mould on younger sibling.

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out that all children have a right to 'to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'. This includes:

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.
3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.
4. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to secure the recovery of maintenance for the child from the parents or other persons having financial responsibility for the child, both within the State Party and from abroad. In particular, where the person having financial responsibility for the child lives in a State different from that of the child, States Parties shall promote the accession to international agreements or the conclusion of such agreements, as well as the making of other appropriate arrangements.

United Nations Concluding Observations

The United Nations Concluding Observations are a set of observations assessing the UK and devolved governments' progress in implementing children's rights. The most recent data was published in June 2023.

All of the recommendations made are fundamentally important for both the UK Government and the Welsh Government. At the time of publication, I highlighted the recommendations related to child poverty and I have continued to make calls to the Welsh Government to include clear targets and measurable indicators as part of the new child poverty strategy and the monitoring framework.

The recommendation under the area on basic health and welfare refers to standard of living:

46 (b) Address the root causes of homelessness among children, strengthen measures to phase out temporary and contingency accommodation schemes and significantly increase the availability of adequate and long-term social housing for families in need, with a view to ensuring that all children have access to affordable, quality housing.

In July 2024 the Welsh Government published a full response to the concluding observations. On homelessness, the Welsh Government said:

** We will be bringing forward a Bill to address the proposals in our White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales which aim to benefit people of all ages, by strengthening measures which encourage services to intervene early to address and prevent the risk of homelessness. It also proposes wider duties on the wider public service centred on the needs of the person seeking assistance, alert to and informed by the trauma they may have experienced. Early intervention will help ensure children and young people have access to the support they need earlier and, where possible, do not reach crisis stage.*

** Prevention of youth homelessness and addressing the root causes, is embedded in the refreshed youth engagement and progression framework, published in September 2022. All local authorities have appointed a Youth Homelessness Coordinator to help identify young people at risk of homelessness and intervene earlier.*

** We will continue to invest in the Youth Support Grant and to support local authorities to build on their early identification systems to ensure young people at risk of homelessness are identified and supported.*

** The Welsh Government recognises that living well in a quality home brings a wide range of benefits to health, learning and prosperity supporting the government's wider agenda for improving outcomes in health and well-being and educational attainment as well as on poverty and decarbonisation. The Welsh Government only award the Social Housing Grant for housing that meets the minimum standards set in the Welsh Development Quality Requirements 2021. The standard sets out the minimum functional quality standards for new and rehabilitated general needs affordable homes. The Welsh Government encourages housing providers and their consultants to aim for standards beyond the minimum requirements specified here and to adopt a holistic view of quality, recognising the benefit that quality and culturally suitable homes will have on both physical and mental well-being for all.*



We could possibly get kicked out because of noise."

14-year-old worried about young siblings making too much noise whilst living in a B&B.

03 THE POLICY CONTEXT IN WALES

All local authorities in Wales have a duty to children and young people in ensuring that they are appropriately housed.

The [Wales \(Housing\) Act 2014](#) sets out the legal framework for homelessness prevention and housing duties in Wales. The below is a breakdown of the relevant sections of the legislation:

Section 66 – Duty to help prevent homelessness

- Local authorities must take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness if a person is at risk within 56 days.

Section 68 – Duty to provide interim accommodation

- If a person is homeless and has a priority need, the local authority must provide temporary accommodation while assessing their case.

Section 70 – Priority need for accommodation

- Families with dependent children are automatically considered to have priority need.
- Other groups include pregnant women, young people leaving care, and those vulnerable due to disability or other factors.

Section 73 – Duty to help secure accommodation

- Local authorities must take reasonable steps to help a homeless person secure suitable accommodation.

Section 75 – Duty to secure accommodation for applicants in priority need

- If homelessness is not resolved under Section 73, the authority must ensure accommodation is provided to those in priority need, including families with children.

Suitability of Accommodation (Wales) Order 2015 (linked to the Act)

- Defines what constitutes “suitable” accommodation, including restrictions on using B&Bs for families with children.

The [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) sets out duties on local authorities to safeguard children and to provide accommodation where applicable. The below is a breakdown of the relevant sections of the legislation:

Section 21 – Duty to assess needs of children

- If a child appears to be in need or care and/or support, the local authority must assess their situation, including housing needs.

Section 37 – Duty to provide care and support for a child in need

- Local authorities must provide services, including housing support, if a child is at risk due to inadequate living conditions.

Section 76 – Provision of accommodation for children in need

- If a child requires accommodation and has no alternative, the local authority must provide it. This applies to unaccompanied children or those whose parents cannot provide suitable housing. This also applies to 16 and 17-year-olds who are homeless; the local authority can accommodate them under this provision, and they will be entitled to the full support and protections as any other child in local authority care.

Section 74 – Looked-after children

- If a child is taken into care, the local authority becomes responsible for ensuring appropriate accommodation.

The Welsh Government Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness refers to support for children, both as part of families and individually, and refers to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. However, the guidance does not include direct reference to children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Shelter Cymru's Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales guidance sets out support for organisations who work with young people leaving care. The rationale of the framework is to provide flexibility and to give young people choice as they transition to adulthood.

The Corporate Parenting Charter details the responsibility of local authorities and public bodies to safeguard and promote the rights of care-experienced young people, and 'a stable home' is one of the key shared principles all Corporate Parents should be supporting.

The Welsh Government published its Strategy for Ending Homelessness in October 2019. Through reform of legislation, the Welsh Government commits to:

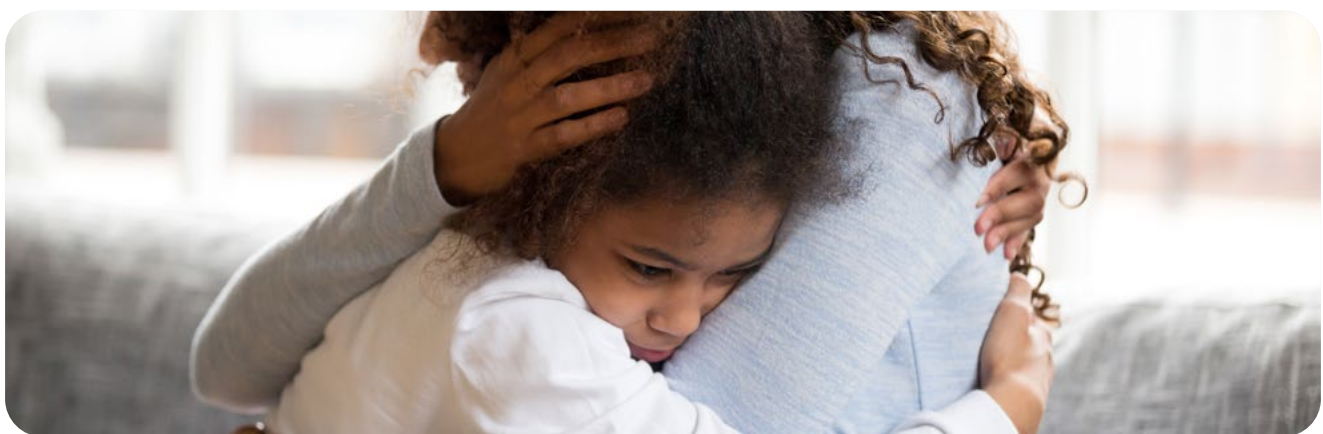
- *The risk of homelessness will be prevented at the earliest possible stage and responsibility for identification and prevention will be shared across the Welsh public service;*
- *Local Housing Authorities will offer a person-centred, trauma-informed service that is led by the needs of those facing homelessness;*

- *Those most likely to be impacted by homelessness will benefit from bespoke proposals to mitigate their risk.*

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 aims at improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. There are seven wellbeing goals for Wales as part of the Act, which call for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.

- *Under section 10(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators ("national indicators") that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid on 16 March 2016.*

One of the national indicators is number 34 'Number of households successfully prevented from becoming homeless, per 10,000 households.'



We moved into emergency housing and a man walked into our house on the first day being there which was a bit nuts"

10-year-old talking about feeling unsafe in their emergency housing.



We had to call the police a lot. He tried to knock our door down. He went to prison."

10-year-old talking about talking about neighbours in their temporary accommodation.



Current duties on local authorities

The [Housing Support Grant](#) provides funding to local authorities in Wales and is designed to prevent homelessness through early intervention. The grant is used by local authorities to deliver services for vulnerable people, including children in families.

The [Housing Support Grant Guidance](#) states that the grant can fund services related to social isolation, translation, provisions when living in temporary accommodation. The guidance also states it can include:

- *'Mediation services to prevent homelessness or help to protect the individual's occupation of their own home. This may include family mediation services for people under 16 where the main purpose is to enable the young person to stay in the family home, however, CCG (Children and Communities Grant) funding may be available (via the Families First programme) for this purpose and should be explored in the first instance, and evidence of working with colleagues in the CCG and youth services should be demonstrated in the planning and commissioning of these services.'*
- *'Relevant costs associated with the provision of effective support, such as childcare or travel expenses, to enable service users to attend courses or other similar activity to address their support needs.'*

Legislation under the [Children and Families \(Wales\) Measure 2010](#) states:

12 Participation of children in local authority decision making:

- (1) A local authority must make such arrangements as it considers suitable to promote and facilitate participation by children in decisions of the authority which might affect them.
- (2) A local authority must –
 - (a) publish information about its arrangements under subsection (1), and
 - (b) keep the information published up to date.
- (3) Section 176 of the Education Act 2002 (c. 32) is repealed by this subsection.

So, whilst in Wales, there is no specific duty on local authorities to engage with children and young people as part of their individual housing strategies, all local authorities must be taking steps in line with the 2010 Measure, to facilitate the participation of children in decisions around housing and homelessness, as this is clearly an issue that directly affects them.

There is a duty on Welsh Government Ministers to consider children's rights under the Measure which partially embeds the UNCRC in Welsh legislation.



I lived in a house, and it was banging. My mum was gonna try and buy it, but it was too much. So, we had to move out cos they sold it."

Young person talking about the best place they'd lived.

Homelessness Statistics in Wales

The disproportionate impact of homelessness on children and families is illustrated by the most recent statistics released by Welsh Government from April 2023 to March 2024 state:

- “27% of all households placed in temporary accommodation at 31 March 2024 were families with children, a decrease from the 29% of households at 31 March 2023, but much lower than the proportion seen prior to the pandemic when nearly 40% of households in temporary accommodation were families with children. Despite a decrease in proportion, the number of families with children in temporary accommodation at 31 March 2024 increased by 10% on the previous year. Of those families with children, 25% were housed within local authority stock, with a further 23% being housed in bed and breakfasts.”
- “At 31 March 2024, RSL (Registered Social Landlord) stock housed the greatest proportion of families with children at 65% of all households, an increase of 19 percentage points on 31 March 2023. Local authority stock and women’s refuges accounted for the next highest proportions of families with children at 49% and 40% respectively.”



Findings from a [report](#) by Bangor University on the economic argument for investing in early Years outlines the effects of poor housing on children, stating:

- ‘Poor housing conditions increase the likelihood of disability and ill health by up to 25% during childhood and early adulthood (Shelter, 2006).’
- ‘We estimate that the NHS in Wales could save £120 million a year in treatment costs for children and adults were we to improve all remaining homes up to current building regulation standards (Nicol et al., 2015). The North Wales CHARISMA study demonstrated that heating and ventilation modifications led to a marginal 14% shift of children from severe to moderate asthma for a total programme cost of £151,152 to Wrexham Borough Council (Edwards et al., 2011; Woodfine et al., 2011).’
- ‘Poor housing is also estimated to cost a further £100 million a year through poorer educational attainment and life chances (Davidson et al., 2011).’
- ‘Children who live in more cohesive neighbourhoods, have stronger families, and attend better schools tend to maintain a higher economic status later in life (Alexander et al., 2014).’

The Welsh Government provides significant support for addressing housing and homelessness via the [Social Housing Grant](#) which offers capital funding to develop affordable housing schemes, including for families; as well as the [Housing with Care Fund](#) which provides specialist housing for vulnerable groups, including children and young people with complex needs. Whilst both grants reference children and young people, there is opportunity to strengthen specific requirements relating to children’s rights under the UNCRC.



Cos I’m turning 18 soon Social Workers aren’t going to try as hard to find me somewhere to live. It’s just going to be a shitty hotel.

Care experienced young person talking about her worries around housing.

CCFW Situation Analysis (authored by Dr Liz Stones)

One of the key strategic priorities for the Children's Commissioner for Wales is to ensure that the office amplifies the views and experiences of children and young people.

Recognising the impact of housing and homelessness on children and young people, but finding a lack of existing literature or analysis, in 2024 we commissioned a situation analysis of this topic, which was carried out by Dr Liz Stones.

The full review can be read [on our website](#). The review details the existing research and publications on children's experiences of housing and/or homelessness and includes a breakdown of protected characteristics including children who are neurodiverse, disabled, survivors of domestic abuse, LGBTQI+, care-experienced, from Black and Ethnic Majority backgrounds, and asylum seekers.

The report concludes that there is a clear need for greater inclusion of voices of children under 16, and the importance of separating children's voices from that of the family unit.

- *'It is clear from an analysis of the available publications, reports and data around housing and homelessness across the UK that the vast majority of the information concerns adults and young people aged 16+. Under 16s are generally presented as 'dependents', without amplifying their voices or presenting deeper analysis of their unique experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness.'*
- *'Over the past few years, research has emerged around young people's experiences of homelessness across the UK and in Wales. However, in much of the research, children's voices (under 16s) are silenced, or their experiences are summarised or paraphrased by parents or care-givers, or they are interviewed retrospectively after the age of 16.'*

The wider UK context

Across the UK, many people struggle to find safe and affordable housing. Some families cannot afford the high cost of rent or home ownership, while others lose their homes due to financial difficulties, job loss, or health issues. As a result, they may experience homelessness, meaning they lack a permanent place to live.

However, being homeless does not always mean living on the streets. Many families stay in temporary accommodation such as hostels or shelters while waiting for permanent housing. Sadly, thousands of children in the UK live in these unstable conditions, often moving frequently, which can make it difficult for them to feel secure, continue their education, and maintain their well-being.

A major cause of homelessness is the shortage of affordable housing. The Senedd's Local Government and Housing Committee [Social Housing Support Report](#), published in November 2024, acknowledges this by referencing the [Welsh Government's 2021-26 Programme for Government](#) and the commitment to *'building 20,000 new low carbon social homes for rent. The commitment is a key element of its plans to prevent housing problems and homelessness. By increasing*

the supply of social housing, the Welsh Government aims to ease pressure on housing services and provide homes that meet the needs of people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.'

While the government and charities are working to address the issue by providing temporary accommodation, building more affordable homes, and offering support services, much more needs to be done to ensure everyone has a safe and stable place to live.

Figures from NHS England-funded [National Child Mortality Database](#) stated that temporary accommodation has contributed to the deaths of at least 74 children in England in the last five years, with 58 of those children being babies under the age of one.

Whilst we don't possess the equivalent figures for Wales, we do know that there are cases of deaths in Wales related to poor housing conditions.

Methodology



Through our research we heard the views of children and professionals on the topics of housing and homelessness.

Our approach took two forms. The first was to conduct a series of one-to-one conversations with children and young people who were identified by their link workers as having lived experience of housing and homelessness issues. The second to conduct a nationwide survey with children aged 5-18 years old.

For our one-to-one research, we spoke to 15 children who had specific experiences of housing issues and homelessness. We spoke to children aged 7 to 17 years old from across Wales. We used our Community Ambassadors network to reach out to children and young people under each protected characteristic and worked with schools to identify children and young people that they felt might like to share their story.

To facilitate this participation, we commissioned an artist to create an illustration which depicted the many types of homes children may be living in, including caravans, B&Bs and flats. These images

can be found in the appendix. The illustration supported children to tell us what they like about their living situation, and what they would wish to change or improve. Professionals were invited to share case studies with us.

As part of our Monthly Matters initiative, 724 children and young people answered the survey individually. A further 665 children took part in groups, with teachers and youth workers submitting a summary of their views. A broad range of ages took part, from children under the age of 5 up to 18-year-olds. We received responses from 20 local authority areas.

You can read our full Monthly Matters report on children and young people's homes on our website.

We also asked organisations such as the Welsh Refugee Council to share case studies with us.



04

KEY THEMES FROM OUR RESEARCH

All the children and young people who took part in this research understood the value of a safe, and secure home. This report has identified several key themes of things that need to change, to ensure every child in Wales has a safe and adequate place to call home.



Poor Housing Conditions

We heard about a variety of issues related to the general poor condition of housing and its impact on children.

A ten-year-old girl living with her Mum and younger sister told us "there is a broken roof in mum's bedroom. We had to put a bucket under it so my sister didn't get soaking in the night. There's mould on every window. It's too expensive. We can't afford the food and the house."

Children from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community living in north Wales told us that in their home "when it rains it floods" and "if you tap the walls it cracks, they're thin".

Describing their privately rented home, one young person said, "my house has dodgy wiring, and I can't plug anything in without being scared I'd get injured."

Whilst another living in a social home said "there are spikes from the previous carpet. It would hurt my feet, so I had to buy crocs." Talking about their previous home, also social housing, they said, "I couldn't use the toilet in my old home for 4 months. We would have to drive to a McDonalds to be able to use the toilet."

Mould and damp were regular themes when discussing adequacy of housing.

A young person living in social housing told us that their "current home is damp. It feels as if the mould and damp is making me unwell" and the "walls are wet to touch."

A Year 6 pupil told us "the building condition was very poor. It was damp, the windows were falling out.



"I want a bed and a bedroom"

Care-experienced young person when asked what they want from a home.

There was no working heating and no carpets. We were moved to emergency hostel. I was worried about having somewhere to live while going to emergency accommodation. My mum was stressed."

There was a striking contrast between these experiences and the answers children and young people gave through our Monthly Matters survey. When asked what they liked about their homes, many talked about 'cosiness', 'warmth', and having their own bedroom. One 10-year-old said *'It is nice and warm, big and cosy, and I love that I am sheltered safe'*. This should be our aspiration for every single child.

Feeling safe

Several young people we interviewed mentioned feeling unsafe in their home. Our team worked closely with their link worker to make sure all the children and young people who took part in this work had the support they needed following on from the sessions. Whilst in our methodology we set out to discuss physical aspects of the housing, some conversations naturally graduated toward safety in terms of relationships.

One care experienced child told us *"I was sleeping in the stairwell of mum's boyfriend's flat. He kicked us both out one night, so we slept in the stairwell of the flat. It was cold and scary as people in the building were (drug) dealers. The worst times were when I was with family because they have unsafe behaviour. My Auntie used her house for her (sex) work and I felt really unsafe at times when she stayed there."*

A 10-year-old told us that they slept with their sibling and their mother in the same bedroom, because they were *"too scared to sleep alone."* The member of our team interviewing the young person said that they became very quiet when talking about feeling safe in their house.

The importance of a safe home, and the feeling of safety, was underlined by children themselves in response to our Monthly Matters survey. When asked 'What makes a good home?' a 10-year-old from Rhondda Cynon Taf accurately reflected the tone of answers we received when they simply said, *'A safe and happy home'*.

Safety was the most common answer behind family, and clearly something that children regarded as fundamental to a happy home life.

Worries about money

Children should not carry the weight of financial worry on their shoulders. But one 10-year-old we spoke to told us that *"Mummy's dealing with rent problems, it's gone up to £700. Bampi lost his job so can't help and is maybe going to lose his house too."*

Our staff member interviewing the child was struck by the fact that they also knew how many years their grandfather had left in work until he retired and how many hours he would need to work to be able to support them again, observing that this knowledge was a lot for a child of their age to understand the complexity of.

Cramped conditions

Access to space, was noted as an issue for several young people. One child told us, *"the kitchen is small, and when we cook together (as a family) it's tricky. I accidentally burned myself this week"*.

We spoke to two siblings who told us that the younger sibling aged 7 sleeps on the sofa downstairs with Mum and his younger sister aged 4. It was unclear during the interview why they were sleeping downstairs, the teacher later explained that they did not have enough bedrooms for the 6 people who lived in this house.

One young, care-experienced young person shared with us their current living arrangements at friends and families' houses: *"I live in a semi-detached house at the minute. It's my friend's house; my friend lives with guardians and her siblings. There is no room, so I sleep on the sofa in the living room."*

Another care experienced child who was living temporarily in her Auntie's 2-bedroom flat with her father and sibling shared *"My Auntie slept in a single bed in a box room. When she would go on holiday, one of us would sleep in there... as a treat."*

One ten-year old child with additional learning needs who lived in a 3 bedroom house with Mum and 6 siblings told us that often the noise in their house



I'm very worried about that happening to us. I really like the house and don't want to move; it's near our Nan's. When I'm older I'm going to get money to help her (mum) keep the house."

Child, aged 10 talking about losing their home.

and the actions of their siblings made them feel like “exploding.” They felt they had a lack of space to let all their feelings out, *“like when you are sad and you just want somewhere to cry on your own.”*

Adequate space was an important theme in our Monthly Matters survey. Children valued their own space and many specifically mentioned their bedrooms. When asked what they liked about their own homes, living somewhere they perceived to be big and spacious was a common answer. Space was also linked to specific children's rights, like the right to play and relax. Children valued having calming and relaxing spaces, quiet and personal spaces, and space to enjoy playing games. 90% of children told us that they enjoyed relaxing or playing in their bedroom.

Impact of poor housing on education

Inadequate housing can have a detrimental effect on education, including having the space to complete schoolwork. One young person shared their experience of living in a Bed & Breakfast:

“The room my parents shared with my siblings was a sensory overload. It had lots of things like toys and iPads in as well as our belongings. It was hard for my younger siblings to focus, so my room was used as a quiet space.”

And another told us about the current state of their social housing:

“The wall in my room is damp so I can’t put a desk or a bookshelf against it.”

One young person detailed the impact on travel to school after moving into a Bed & Breakfast, *“it was so far to go to school. I had to get up early and it was affecting our sleep, and my parents were stressed.”*

We also heard from a 10-year-old child that the landlord evicted the family because they wanted to sell the house. The family were then moved into an emergency hostel out of the school area, 10 miles away.

One young person, whose mother had fled domestic abuse and who were both now living in social housing, said:

“It’s frustrating as I’m academic and want to do well in school. I used to be classed as gifted and talented. It (the house) affects my ability to complete homework on time.” At only 14 years old, this young person can recognise the adverse effect that poor housing can have on educational attainment.

Another young person told us, *“my mum has a chest of drawers in her room, and I always take a kitchen chair up there if I want to do something. I’d use that for schoolwork.”*

The Welsh Refugee Council shared several case studies with us, explaining the impact of frequent moves on young, refugee children:

“The children were registered in schools in Cardiff first and Swansea next, but the constant relocations meant they had to change schools’ multiple times. This disrupted their learning continuity, making it difficult for them to keep up with the curriculum and form stable relationships with peers and teachers.”

“The instability negatively impacted their academic performance. Frequent moves meant they missed critical lessons and struggled to adapt to new educational environments, leading to gaps in their knowledge and skills.”

Our Monthly Matters survey gave an insight into the specific elements of their homes that young people deem important to their education. Almost a third of children answering a question on the spaces they use for schoolwork said that a quiet and calm space helps them to work, and around a fifth specifically mentioned having a suitable desk or table to work on.

Impact of poor housing on health

Our findings highlighted the significant impact inadequacy of housing has on young people’s health. Several young people we spoke to detailed experiences of respiratory issues as a subsequent result of damp and mould.

A young person with experience of living in a privately rented home said, *“it’s mouldy and it’s affected everyone’s health. Mould was by our beds and on all the walls and the house was falling apart.”*

“We were coughing and getting sick, and our stuff was getting damp and mouldy.”

And one young person who currently lives in social housing said, *“I’ve suffered with respiratory issues since living in this home.”*

Young people also told us how living in a Bed & Breakfast had impacted their health.

One young person told us how living in a B&B and the subsequent change in routine for their siblings with medical conditions *“really affected my younger siblings, due to their age and medical needs. They found the move challenging.”*

Two siblings aged 14 and 15, also having lived in a Bed & Breakfast after fleeing domestic abuse, told us of their experience of access to quality food, *"the room only had a kettle and maybe a microwave. We ate a lot of pot noodle. I like pot noodle now but it's not the best nutritionally."*

For one asylum seeking family, the case study shared with us by the Welsh Refugee Council detailed the impact of medical care disruption:

"The anaemic child had ongoing health checks in Cardiff. The relocations (between London, Cardiff and Swansea) interrupted these medical appointments, causing delays in treatment and monitoring. This inconsistency in healthcare could exacerbate the child's condition and lead to further health complications."

When discussing the area they currently live in, one care-experienced young person said, *"you can walk round corners and find needles on the floor."*

Impact of relocations on mental health

Unstable housing circumstances can be detrimental to all children and young people's mental health. However, refugee (a child who has fled their country due to armed conflict, persecution, or violence) and asylum-seeking families (families who have left their country and applied for asylum in another country) are especially vulnerable to frequent relocations, sometimes moving long distances from their previous housing.

As case studies from the Welsh Refugee Council show us, *"the lack of stable accommodation and community ties led to feelings of isolation and loneliness" for children and families," further impacting their mental health and overall quality of life."*

"The uncertainty and instability of their living situation caused significant stress and anxiety for the entire family. The children, in particular, experienced heightened anxiety due to the constant changes in their environment, affecting their overall well-being and ability to focus on their studies."

Parental stress and the effect on children were another area of concern, *"the single mother experienced increased stress and anxiety due to the frequent relocations and the responsibility of caring for her four children. This stress could affect her ability to provide a stable and supportive environment for her children."*

During interviews with children and young people, several of them highlighted the mental health impact that moving had on them and their parents. One young person was particularly worried about the impact of moving on her mother's mental health *"Mum suffers with PTSD, it's stressed her out."*

Impact of relocations on sense of community and wellbeing

Several young people told us about the impact of moving house. On moving into social housing, one young person said, *"it's stressful to move with schoolwork on top"*.

Another who moved into a Bed & Breakfast with their family said *"my family didn't know the area so I couldn't go out. We didn't know where things like the parks were and so it was hard for my siblings to burn off any energy and stay quiet."*

For some, there was a theme of dignity. Whilst moving into inadequate temporary accommodation, in this case a Bed & Breakfast, two siblings told us that *"it didn't feel like home" and "a lot of our belongings from the private rented house had been ruined because of the mould and damp."*

Heartbreakingly, one young person who had moved between several social housing properties told us, *"I like to write poetry, but I feel uninspired. I don't get to thrive or grow here."*

Community and overall well-being were particular themes for refugee and asylum-seeking children. As a case study shared with us by the Welsh Refugee Council detailing a family's experience of social integration said, *"the children faced challenges in integrating into new school communities. They had to repeatedly adjust to new social environments, which affected their ability to form lasting friendships and feel a sense of belonging."*

The family also experienced community disconnection: *"frequent relocations hindered the family's ability to integrate into local communities. They struggled to build lasting relationships and support networks, which are crucial for their social and emotional well-being."*

One child, aged 10, who is living in an overcrowded house, told us, *"I would want a room on my own. Would be good to have space to let feelings out."*



Council houses we used to live in felt like 'I'm not sure I'm supposed to be here. It's not ours'."

15-year-old talking about their time at previous houses.

Stigma of social housing

Stigma surrounding social housing across the UK continues to push negative stereotypes.

In February 2024, housing policy research project Tyfu Tai Cymru (TTC) published a report which explored the development of new social housing and the desirability of homes to both the tenants who will live in them as well as the wider community. Whilst the research did not include involvement from children and young people, the findings on language and perception of social housing stated:

- *'The language used throughout development consultation stages needs to be plain and clear for all.'*
- *'It was reported that many communities do not understand the role of registered social landlords i.e. their purpose in providing homes and the way in which the homes are managed. The term homelessness is emotive and there is a lack of understanding as to what it actually means, both within communities and for staff who are not directly involved in running frontline services.'*

Several echoed these views and discussed the need for a shift in public perception of social housing. A 14-year-old who lives in social housing shared with us, *"there's a view that social housing means you can't amount to anything. We shouldn't get looked down on for living in social housing, get treated like badly or hear the word 'scum'."*

When asked what could change to help combat stigma, the young person said, *"social housing is neglected in legislation and by providers. There don't seem to be any laws to enforce, only guidance."*

Care-experienced young people

Our literature review acknowledges the vulnerability to homelessness that care-experienced young people are more likely to experience, referencing *'a 2018 UK study found between 22-33% of care experienced young people experienced homelessness within a year of leaving care. They often lack support networks and are expected to transition to independence earlier than peers, in addition to other factors contributing to vulnerability.'*

We spoke with one care-experienced young person, who at one point during their time in supported accommodation, had 2 pairs of pyjamas as their main form of clothing. *"Most of the time it's about not*

knowing where your next meals coming from or if you'll have a meal. And if you'll have shelter and somewhere dry and warm to sleep."

However, they began to spend more time at their grandmother's, aunt's and friend's houses. They were warned that this would mean they would lose their placement, and they were subsequently given notice to move.

The move date happened to fall over an Easter weekend. Staff supporting them told them that they would need to speak to advocates and social workers urgently on the day of their notice as the bank holiday would mean nobody would be in work until the day of their eviction from the setting. *"You don't know if you'll have a roof over your head."*

The young person is currently sofa surfing, keeping their belongings under the sofa and on the bench in the kitchen, *"I only have a few things, some clothes, make-up and guitar"*. Their current living arrangement also disrupts their sleep, *"I have to wait until everyone goes to bed. If someone wants to stay up until 3am then I have to too"*.

Whilst this report has focused on the experiences of young people under 16, we continue to hear concerns through our casework service from care leavers in relation to their accommodation as they transition into adulthood. The concerns include issues around a lack of 'step down' supported accommodation. What this mean in practice is that young people can go from accommodation which provided 24-hour support to being placed in inappropriate accommodation, such as B&Bs and hostels, with no onsite support. Other issues include pathway planning processes where young people are having to present themselves as homeless on their 18th birthday.

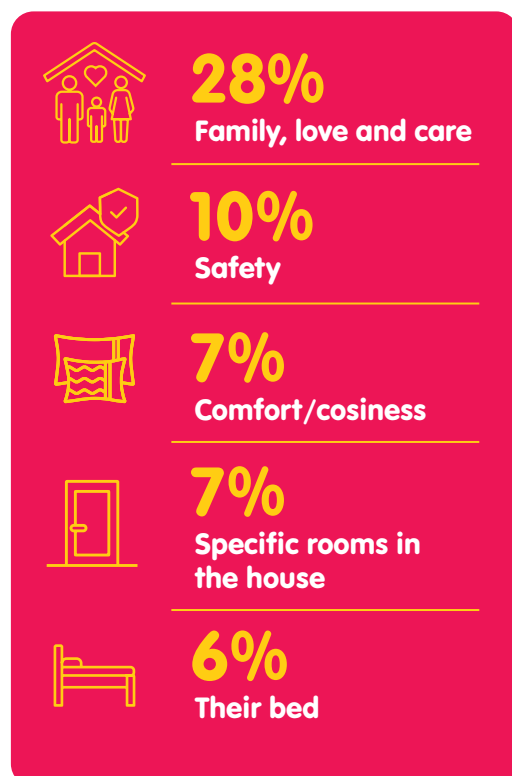
We recommended in 2016 that Welsh Government should explore the extension of the When I'm Ready scheme to all children in care and not just those in foster care placements, to ensure equal access to ongoing support for everyone. This was accepted by Welsh Government, but no progress has been made against this. As a result of this inactivity, it remains the case that many 18 year olds leaving the care of local authorities in Wales are placed in inappropriate accommodation and some becoming homeless – for us, this situation is unacceptable.



What makes a good home?

Our Monthly Matters survey responses showed a painful contrast between children's basic housing needs and the experiences we heard through our one-on-one interviews. Safety, cosiness, space and warmth all featured regularly in children's answers but were far too often missing elements in our face-to-face conversations.

Below shows the five most frequently mentioned terms in response to the question **'What makes a good home?'**, answered by 736 children:



Whilst children taking part in our face-to-face engagement told us:

I would like a bookshelf and a desk."

No mould and spiders, they look disgusting and dirty. You need a space to feel comfy and if you don't feel comfy you can't sleep."

If you are going to a new house and you don't feel safe and secure. You need a house that's perfect and secure."

I want to make a house a home."

There needs to be a standard, so that children can thrive regardless of housing."

To be happy in my home."



Conclusions and Recommendations

Housing is an essential determinant of children's rights and well-being. The ongoing debates and policy developments in Wales around adequate housing, affordability, and security are crucial for safeguarding children's rights.

Adequate housing isn't just a matter of providing shelter – it's integral to a child's physical and emotional development, health, access to education, and future opportunities. The ongoing advocacy for a rights-based approach to housing in Wales reflects the need for policies that prioritize children's access to stable, adequate, and affordable homes as fundamental to upholding their rights.

Despite the right all children have to a good standard of living under article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), this research has laid bare children's and young people's experiences of feeling unsafe in their housing, of living in cramped living conditions which impair their ability to thrive and learn, and the

negative impact on their physical and mental health of living with mould and damp. We've heard clearly the weight all of this can place on young shoulders; a weight no child should have to bear. This is the first time that these experiences have been heard nationally from under 16's but it must not be the last:

This year, we'll be looking at how local authorities comply with Section 12 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, which places a duty on them all to ensure children are being consulted and listened to. As part of this work, we'll look at how children and young people have participated in decisions affecting their housing and will share those findings with Welsh Government with suggestions on any additional monitoring required.

This report shows us that the current housing system and provision in Wales is failing children and breaching their rights. We need to acknowledge this and commit to overhauling the system to ensure every child in this country has a safe and adequate place to call home, where they can enjoy the foundation of a good childhood that we'd want all our children to experience.

At a time when Welsh Government is paying increased attention to the importance of adequate housing (e.g. through its recently published White paper 'Securing a Path Towards Adequate Housing, Including Fair Rents and Affordability'), there is an opportunity and indeed a duty under

the Children's (Wales) Measure 2011 to more fully consider the specific impact on children's rights of housing and homelessness issues.

As such, we make the following recommendations:

- 1.** Welsh Government must review all of its housing and homelessness guidance to ensure there are specific requirements relating to children's rights under the UNCRC.

This includes, but is not limited to:
 - The Housing Support Grant guidance
 - the Children and Communities Grant guidance
 - the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness
- 2.** Welsh Government should direct Local Authorities to ensure that children's needs and rights are directly considered, including speaking to any relevant children, when formulating Personal Housing Plans. Welsh Government should work with WLGA to develop and issue guidance and template documents to ensure consistent application of these plans across Wales.
- 3.** Local Authorities should hold multi agency or multi departmental discussions when placing families in temporary accommodation, to ensure that the rights and needs of the children, including access to health and education, are being properly considered and addressed within Personal

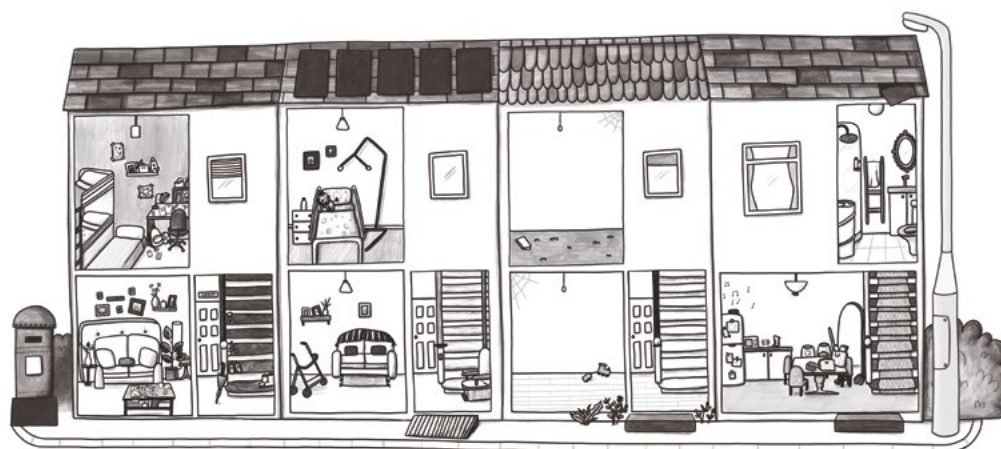
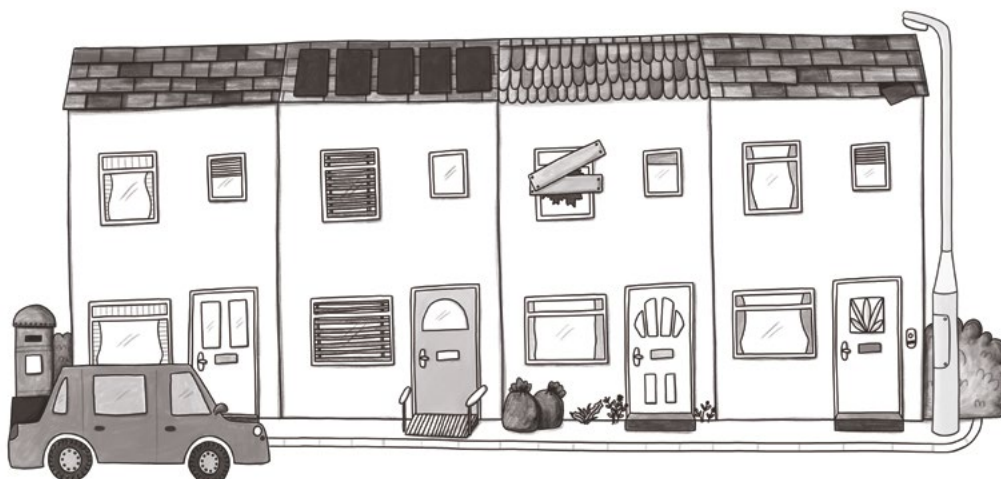
Housing Plans. The Right Way framework from my office would assist with developing plans that work to uphold children's rights in public services.

- 4.** As part of its targeted monitoring of the Corporate Parenting Charter and pledges, Welsh Government should undertake specific monitoring of health agencies and housing associations' pledges, ensuring that children and young people are included in the setting and monitoring of the actions.
- 5.** Welsh Government should undertake a review of Local Authorities and other agencies' compliance with the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales to ensure consistent support for care leavers' housing needs and personal safety.
- 6.** Welsh Government should commission research with refugee and asylum-seeking children and their families to establish the adequacy of the housing/accommodation provision for them in Wales and whether the support on offer is meeting children's needs and rights.

05 APPENDIX

We used the following illustrations in our face-to-face interviews to help facilitate discussions with young people. They were developed with feedback from young people to depict a wide range of homes. They were illustrated by Sian Moore.





Nicely decorated makes a big difference between having a council house decorated house. They have a specific wallpaper and units they use and it's not homely."

Young person, aged 15 talking about what she would want from a future home.



Front door didn't work, had to go through the back door. I remember hard wood floors and my feet being cold going downstairs!"

Sibling talking about their time at emergency accommodation.





It was an old house, and they were building a new estate around us. We'd go and walk and look at the new houses they were building. We were never going to buy one."

Siblings talking about walking around a new build estate near their emergency accommodation.



The room was really boring. There wasn't lots of floor space. We'd put stuff on the bed, so we'd have floor space and then take it off to go to bed"

Siblings talking about lack of space whilst staying in a B&B.

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