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Annex 1

WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SCOPING PAPER

1. Introduction

Finding and keeping accommodation is one of the hardest things for young people when they leave home and in the following years. This becomes harder still when the demand for housing is greater than the housing is available. Young people form a significant element in the homeless population, and face particular difficulties in finding and sustaining accommodation. These difficulties, and the strategic response of the Welsh Assembly Government, are set out in this paper.

2. Aspects of Youth Homelessness

Finding and sustaining accommodation is one of the hardest aspects of the transition to independence for young people. When they are leaving a supportive family environment this can still be difficult, but the young person is more likely to be able to maintain continuity of accommodation, with the possibility of returning to home when they need to.

Many young people leave their childhood home in an unplanned way, perhaps due to family conflict. They may then lack support or a home to return to when problems arise. People leaving the care system are particularly vulnerable as a result of this lack of social networks when a subsequent crisis occurs.

Young people generally face difficulty in securing private rented sector accommodation, as they are perceived as a greater risk than older people. They are likely to have lower incomes, less capital, and are seen to be less stable in their lifestyles. At the same time they are less likely to be aware of how the housing market works, where to get advice, and also have less developed life skills in managing a tenancy.

These difficulties are compounded by the lower rates of housing benefit that young people are eligible for, particularly the single room rent restriction for under 25s.

The experiences of care leavers exemplify many of the problems faced by other young vulnerable people. At a recent conference with local authorities to address the continuing problems in the transition to independence, it was reported that although homelessness was not a major problem at the point of

leaving care, the vulnerability of the young people often led to a crisis involving loss of accommodation, and then they were in an even worse position as they were considered 'intentionally homeless' and could not get a reference. They also reported that the limited range of options, which often included periods in Bed and Breakfast and hostels mixing with other unsuitable clientele, often undermined progress to independence.

A substantial amount of literature has been written about youth homelessness. A study by CHAR and other homelessness charities in 1996 found that the younger people leave home, the more likely they are to become homeless, and those who left home due to family friction were also at higher risk. The youth homelessness charity 'Safe in the City' carried out a study of vulnerable young people in 2000, and identified a range of risk indicators, including poverty, family instability, problems at school and school exclusion, low self-esteem, poor literacy, criminal behaviour, mental health problems, teenage pregnancy, and unemployment. It found that there were group factors, such as the area where people lived and their ethnicity, which when combined with personal factors such as poor social skills or mental health, resulted in high risk of homelessness.

3. Statistics on Youth Homelessness

Attached at appendix 1 are some tables and charts produced by the Statistics Directorate, drawn from local authority quarterly returns. This uses data on statutory homeless presentations and acceptances, based on the duties set out below.

The information shows that the two main youth homelessness categories represented a fairly constant proportion of all homelessness acceptances, at about 10% for 16-17 year olds and 2% for young people at risk 18-21. There are large variations in local authority acceptances for the January to March 2006 quarter, such as between Carmarthenshire and Torfaen, although this may relate partly to different recording and prevention practices.

These figures are just for acceptances for the full rehousing duty. Even these figures will understate the true figures, as many there will be many young people within the other categories, such as young single parents, young offenders leaving custody, and young people accepted under the general vulnerability category.

There will be many other young people who have presented to an authority but have been deemed as not in priority need, intentionally homeless, or not homeless by the statutory definition but still at risk of homelessness. Beyond that, many other homeless young people will not have approached local authorities because they are not aware of the help they can receive, or feel that they are not entitled to sufficient help to meet their needs.

Thus, the true extent of youth homelessness is very difficult to measure.

4. Local authority Duties

Local authorities have duties to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. For some people in 'priority need' they must find them suitable housing. For others they must provide them with advice so that they can find their own accommodation.

In 2001 the Welsh Assembly Government extended 'priority need' to include all 16 & 17 year olds, and also to care leavers and other young people at risk of sexual or financial exploitation aged 18-20.

The legislation also requires local authorities to give priority need to other people who are vulnerable as a result of a special reason.

The statutory Code of Guidance asks local authorities to give particular consideration to young people who have no recourse to parental support.

Local authorities also have a duty to formulate homelessness strategies. All authorities have adopted strategies, but the extent to which they measure and address youth homelessness varies. They are expected to work with their Young Peoples Partnerships and other youth organisations in planning homelessness services for young people, with a particular focus on prevention. They are also required to work with the YPP and local young people to audit the extent and suitability of existing provision in housing (as well as other services to which they have an entitlement) and to develop strategies to address any gaps in provision.

A wide range of services have been developed at local level to help prevent youth homelessness or offer housing and support to vulnerable young people. Advice, mediation and supported housing are particularly important in this context. Many of these services are funded by the Welsh Assembly Government through Homelessness Grant funding (s180) or Supporting People Revenue Grant (SPRG)-see below.

Local authorities also have duties under the Children Act 1989, ss17-20, to assess and provide for 'children in need', including provision of housing if necessary.

5. National Homelessness Strategy 2006-8

The National Homelessness Strategy 2006-8 sets out how the Welsh Assembly Government is addressing the issue of youth homelessness. Section 1.7 on Children and Young People is contained at appendix 2.

The Welsh Assembly Government realises that the best way to prevent homelessness amongst young people is to provide them with the right advice and understanding before they leave school. The national homelessness strategy makes commitments to:

- Require all Young Peoples Partnerships (YPPs) to work with housing colleagues in local authorities to identify the particular housing needs of young people
- Explore the development of a training package for youth workers on dealing with housing issues
- Establish a consultation mechanism on the National Homelessness Strategy to involve young people in its development.

Progress

On the first commitment, YPPs have been asked to prepare plans to address the housing needs of young people in their areas, by the end of March 2007. They have also been asked to expand participation in decision making amongst young homeless people.

On the development of a training package for youth workers, we have awarded Shelter Cymru £72,000 over the next two years to produce an information pack for use by the Youth Service, to support its implementation, and to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.

Housing officials are in discussion with Youth Policy colleagues on establishing a consultation mechanism with young people on the National Homelessness Strategy. This is likely to involve a range of channels, particularly the Local Youth Forums and young people's voluntary organisations.

Other Action-Funding

The Homelessness Grant programme supports a range of projects which work specifically or primarily with young people. This includes the following examples:

- The WAG is working with Shelter Cymru to promote best practice work in schools and youth settings, so that young people have an understanding of the consequences of homelessness and how to avoid it. Funding has been provided to develop and promote the HouseMate pack which has been sent to all schools, and a database of good practice on providing information to young people is being developed.
- Barnardos receive continuing funding for a youth assessment and family mediation service, as part of the multi-agency Bays project in Swansea.
- Funding is provided to NACRO for a Youth Homelessness Prevention project, involving outreach work with young people. This project has produced a DVD on their work.
- Powys receive funding for the development of a Nightstop project, involving approved volunteers who will offer emergency lodgings to young people facing a homelessness crisis.
- Llamau have been awarded a good practice grant to develop a toolkit for family mediation work with young people.

The WAG supports a wide range of projects at the local level to prevent and tackle homelessness, many of which are young person focused. The range of these projects includes housing advice, bond boards, emergency

accommodation, day centres, nightshelters and outreach work with young homeless people.

In addition, the Supporting People programme delivers supported housing to vulnerable young people who have been or would otherwise be threatened with homelessness. The Supporting People Revenue Grant (SPRG) criteria include a category for young homeless people. £7,364,000 is paid annually (2005/2006) to provide 2401 units of support for young single homeless and young people leaving care. The true figure for young people being supported is higher as many other projects, such as those dealing with substance misuse or offending behaviour will also accommodate young people.

Other Action-Legislation and Policy

The Assembly Government has already passed legislation which will restrict the powers of local authorities to place young people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The statutory Code of Guidance provides advice to local authorities on partnership working to ensure young people have their needs properly assessed.

Commitments have also been made in the National Service Framework for Children to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast for families and young people, and the Youth Offending Strategy contains commitments to assess and help secure suitable accommodation for young people.

Officials maintain a dialogue with local authorities on how they are implementing their duties and the difficulties they face, through visits to authorities and discussions at the local authority network. They have identified young people as one of the hardest groups to secure sustainable accommodation for.

For this reason we are in the process of commissioning research to explore the most appropriate forms of housing and support for young people.

5. Issues for Review

There are a wide range of issues affecting youth homelessness. Some of these have been well researched, others less so.

The Committee may wish to consider the following in particular:

- The risk indicators for homelessness and how work may be done to intervene using these indicators
- Progress in joint working at local level to address youth homelessness, including the role of social services as well as YPPs
- Views of young people on the quality and availability of homelessness services, and what makes a good service
- How local authorities apply the legislation to young people, particularly intentionality.
- Good practice across Wales and elsewhere in prevention and

successful transitions to independent living.

6. Parties to Consult

The Committee may wish to hear evidence from the following as part of this process:

- ❖ Local Youth Forums
- ❖ Urdd
- ❖ Funky Dragon
- ❖ Voices from Care
- ❖ Shelter Cymru
- ❖ Cymorth Cymru
- ❖ Voluntary organisations working with young people, such as Barnardos, Llamau, GISDA, NSPCC, YMCA(Wales) and others
- ❖ The Children's Commissioner
- ❖ Local YPP co-ordinators
- ❖ WLGA and local authority homelessness representatives.

Appendix 1

Youth Homelessness Statistics

Households accepted as homeless by priority need

Table 1 Number of households accepted as homeless by priority need

	Young person at risk 18-21	Young person at risk 16-17	All Acceptances
Apr-Jun 01	25	136	1,298
Jul-Sept 01	26	173	1,413
Oct-Dec 01	28	123	1,208
Jan-Mar 02	33	162	1,414
Apr-Jun 02	26	159	1,537
Jul-Sept 02	40	190	1,764
Oct-Dec 02	38	185	1,722
Jan-Mar 03	39	216	1,952
Apr-Jun 03	38	208	2,087
Jul-Sept 03	44	261	2,363
Oct-Dec 03	43	231	2,110
Jan-Mar 04	53	237	2,587
Apr-Jun 04	53	223	2,459
Jul-Sept 04	44	274	2,603
Oct-Dec 04	38	251	2,391
Jan-Mar 05	45	222	2,403
Apr-Jun 05	39	207	2,319
Jul-Sept 05	56	155	2,094
Oct-Dec 05	36	132	1,560
Jan-Mar 06	39	187	1,838

(a) Under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

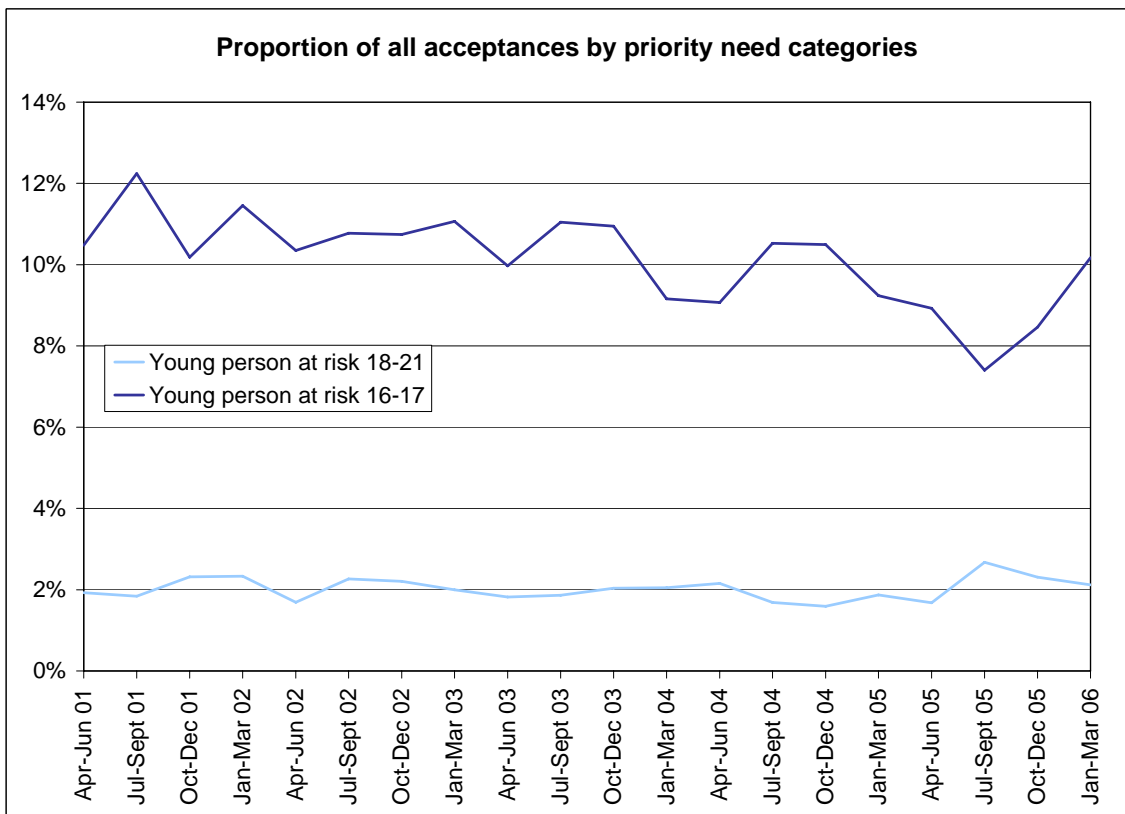
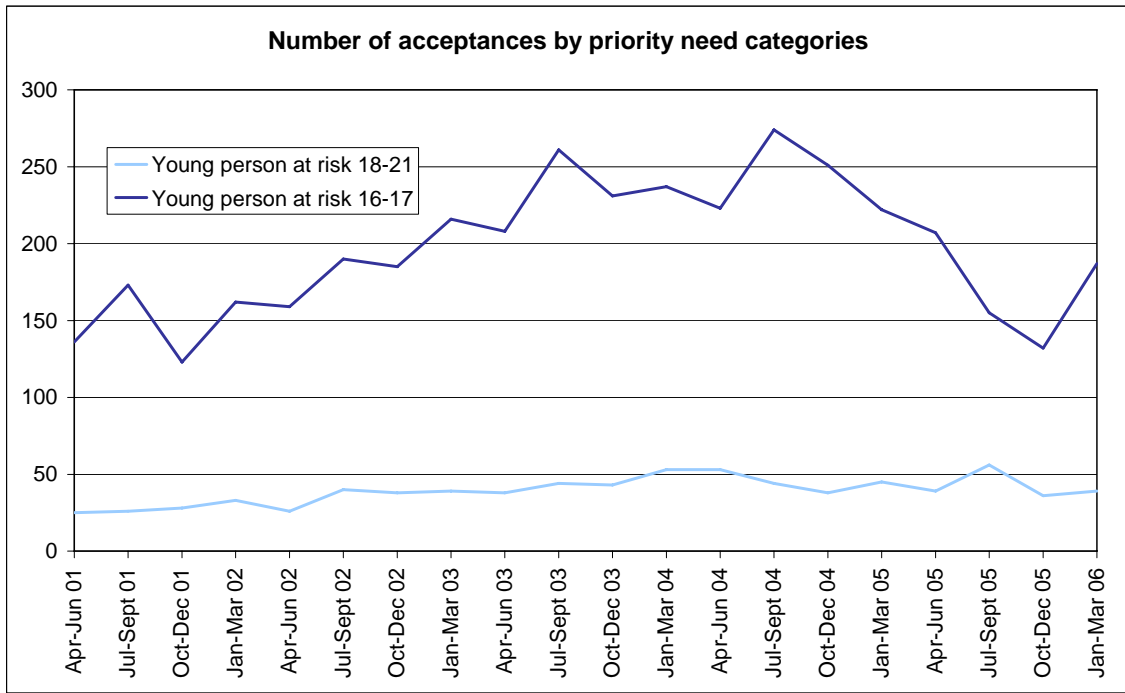
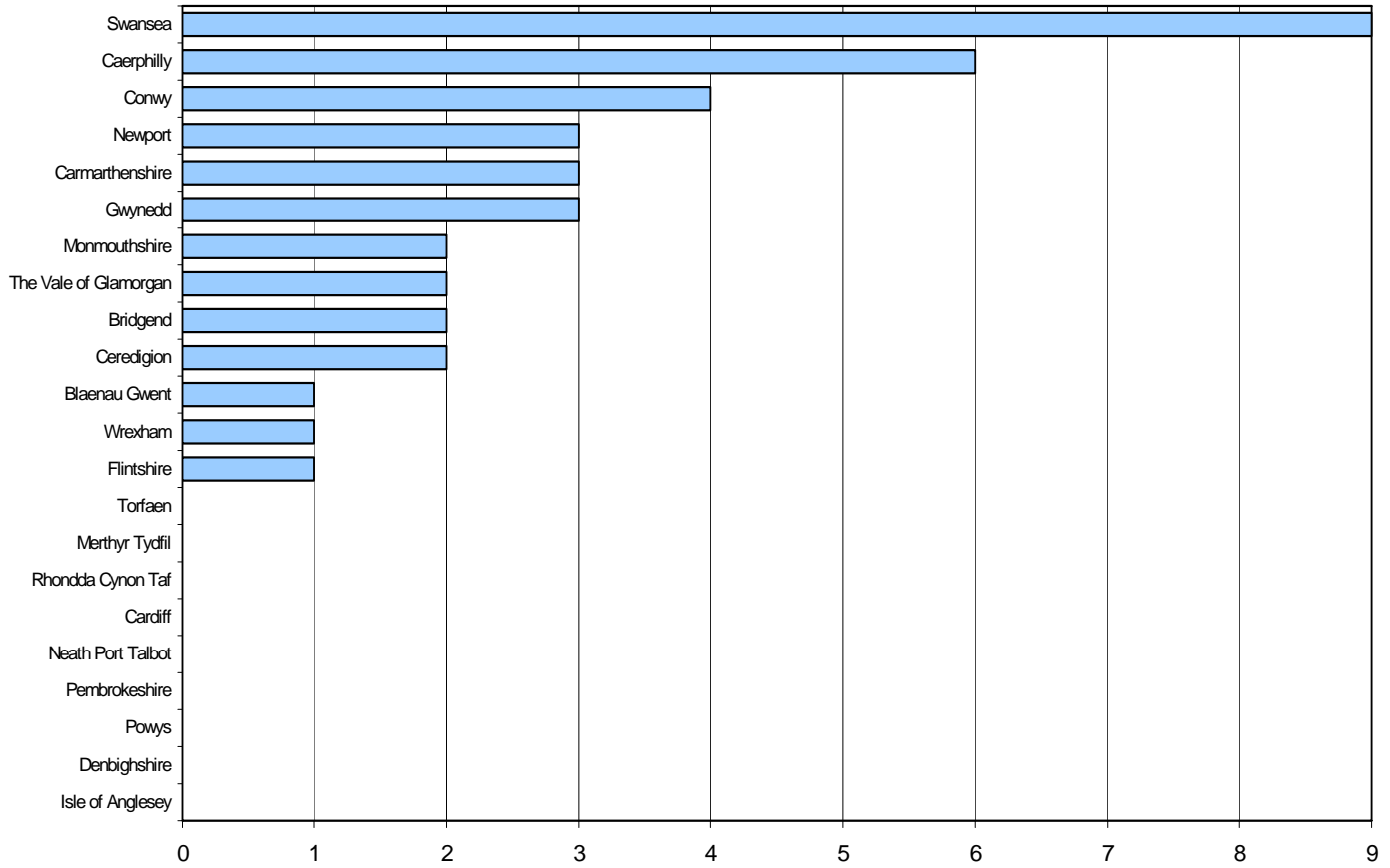


Table 2 Number of households accepted as homeless by priority need and local authority, Jan to March 2006

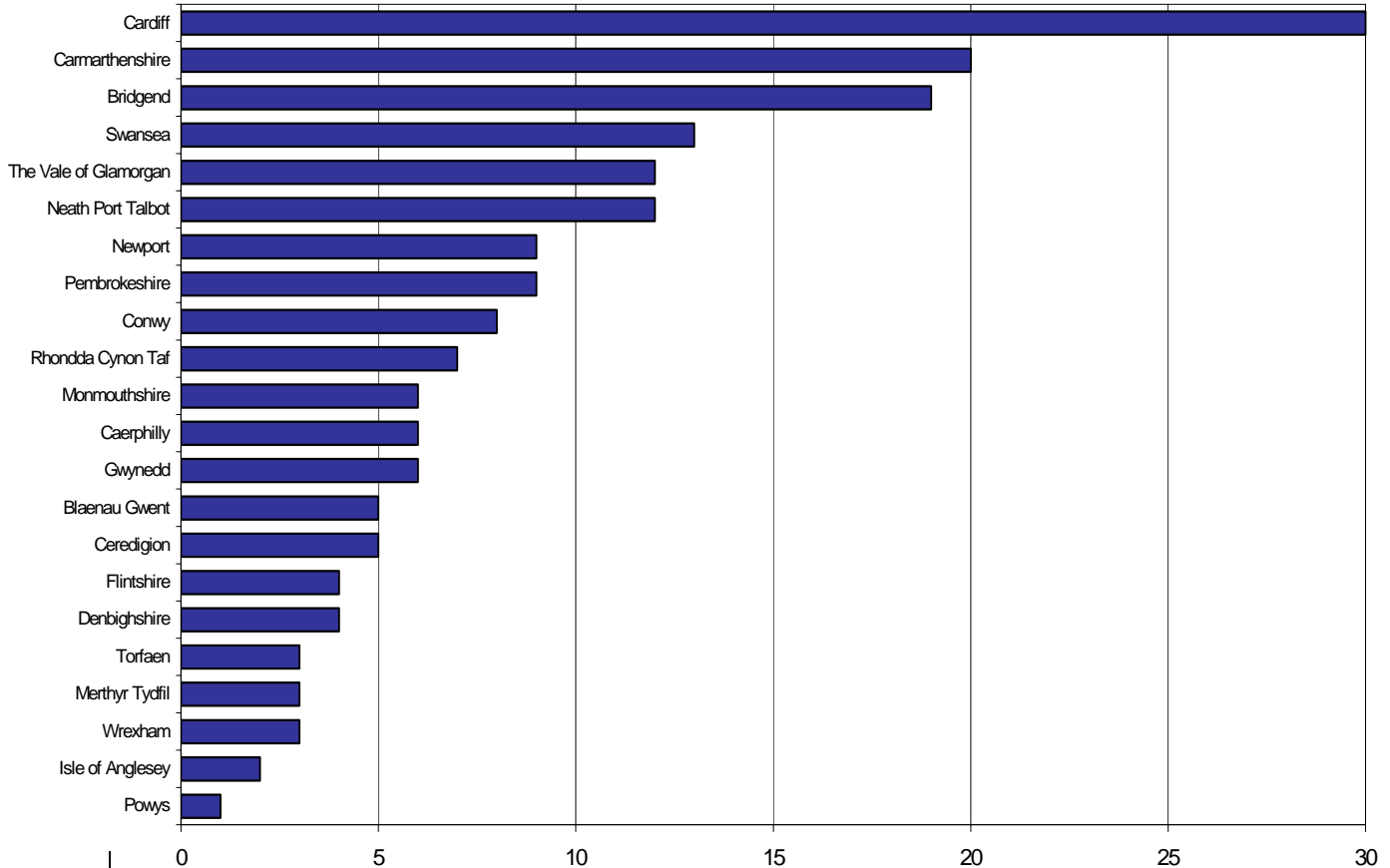
	Young person at risk 18-21	Young person at risk 16-17	All Acceptances
Isle of Anglesey	0	2	31
Gwynedd	3	6	86
Conwy	4	8	73
Denbighshire	0	4	44
Flintshire	1	4	64
Wrexham	1	3	58
Powys	0	1	44
Ceredigion	2	5	29
Pembrokeshire	0	9	99
Carmarthenshire	3	20	115
Swansea	9	13	282
Neath Port Talbot	0	12	66
Bridgend	2	19	216
The Vale of Glamorgan	2	12	39
Cardiff	0	30	195
Rhondda Cynon Taf	0	7	44
Merthyr Tydfil	0	3	31
Caerphilly	6	6	105
Blaenau Gwent	1	5	39
Torfaen	0	3	60
Monmouthshire	2	6	46
Newport	3	9	72
Wales	39	187	1,838

(a) Under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

**Acceptances by priority need category: young person aged 18-21
January to March 2006**



**Acceptances by priority need category: young person aged 16-17
January to March 2006**



Appendix 2

National Homelessness Strategy 2006-8 Extract

1.7 Children and Young People

1.7.1 Local authorities are expected to involve Young Peoples Partnerships in their local homelessness strategy planning. More work needs to be done to make this joint working a reality.

Young Peoples Partnerships will be required to audit the housing needs of young people in their area by 2007/8. This will have to include a 2-year action plan, with built-in outcome measures, and this process will need to involve a high level of joint working with housing services. The advice resource for young people 'Clic' provides information on how they can avoid becoming homeless.

New initiatives are being promoted to develop skills in the Young Persons workforce, which will help the sector to address housing issues

The needs of children affected by homelessness have been recognised in the statutory guidance given to local authorities where families are deemed to be intentionally homeless.

The Welsh Assembly Government has consulted on proposals for legislation that will ensure the needs of children are taken account of in the allocation of temporary accommodation. The legislation will also ensure they are not placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation except for very short periods.

We will:

- Introduce legislation to provide better protection for children in homeless families
by June 2006
- Require YPPs to work with housing colleagues to identify the particular housing needs of young people
by December 2007
- Explore the development of a training package for youth workers on dealing with housing issues
by December 2007
- Establish a consultation mechanism on the National Homelessness Strategy to involve young people in its development
by December 2006
- Introduce the National Service Framework for Children to promote joint working to support successful transitions for families affected by homelessness
by June 2006

We will expect:

- Local Young Peoples Partnerships to audit the housing needs of young people and develop 2-year action plans with built-in outcome measures to

address them.

- Local YPPs to work jointly with local authority housing services to identify and plan for the needs of homeless young people
- Local housing services and other organisations working with homeless children and young people establish guidelines for referring those at risk to social services.
- Local authorities ensure children in homeless families are linked to health and education services.