

# MINUTES of Cross Party Group (CPG) for Children in Our Care

12 December 2023, 11am-12am, Video Conference Room Ty Hywel (Hybrid)

Sponsored by Jane Dodds MS

## 1. Welcome

Jane Dodds MS opened the meeting and welcomed those in person and online. Today's meeting will focus on the White Paper produced around homelessness and its impact on care experience children and young people, and what actions we can take forward. It will also look at the appointment of the role of the Children's Commissioner and how that can be incorporated into the new children's, babies and young people act that the CPG are working on,

## 2. Attendees and Apologies

Name	Organisation	Email
Jane Dodds MS	Member of Senedd	jane.dodds@senedd.wales
Helen Mary Jones	Voices From Care Cymru	helenmary.jones@vfcc.org.uk
Phoebe Jenkins	Researcher, Jane Dodds Office	phoebe.jenkins@senedd.wales
Rhys Taylor	Senior Advisor, Jane Dodds Office	rhys.taylor@senedd.wales
Freya Reynolds-Feeney	Children's Commissioner Office	feeney@childcomwales.org.uk
Elizabeth Bryan	Fostering Network	elizabeth.bryan@fostering.net
Sharon Lovell	NYAS	sharon.lovell@nyas.net
Sian Thomas	Senedd Research	sian.thomas@senedd.wales
Shaun Bendle	Llamau	
Beth Gallivan	Llamau	
Jennie Bibbings	Senedd Research	Jennie.bibbings@senedd.wales
Ann Bell	Adoption UK	ann@adoptionuk.org.uk
Tiff		
Sarah Durrant	TGP Cymru	sarah.Durrant@tgpcymru.org.uk
Elizabeth Bryan	Fostering Network	Elizabeth.Bryan@fostering.net

## Apologies

Mark Isherwood MS

Jack Sargeant MS

Sarah Murphy MS

Sioned Williams MS

## 3. Annual General Meeting (AGM) for Cross Party Group on Children in Our Care

Jane Dodds MS opened the AGM and Helen Mary Jones from Voices from Care Cymru spoke to the attached Annual Report 2023, confirmed that the papers had been seen before hand.

Nominations sought for a Chair going forward – Jane Dodds was proposed by written nominations from Jack Sargeant MS and Mark Isherwood MS.

Nominations sought for a Vice Chair going forward -

Secretariat appointed – Helen Mary Jones at Voices From Care Cymru

#### **4. Notes of the Previous meeting**

All in agreement with notes from the previous meeting and happy to move forward.

#### **5. Welsh Government White Paper on Ending Homelessness and possible implications for care experienced young people.**

Introduced by Sharon Lovell (NYAS) and Beth Gallivan and Shaun Bendle (Llamau)

##### Sharon Lovell (NYAS)

Thank you for the opportunity to share with the group. Concern over the Welsh Government commitment to end youth homelessness by 2027, more homelessness now than in 2014. Headlines from her roles around the proposed changes in the White Paper that are currently out for consultation until 15<sup>th</sup> January:

Proposal to eradicate the priority need for care experienced young people as part of the assessment process; appalled when read, care experience people had to be a priority in terms of giving support. Agree that it is good in principle, with everyone being equal in terms of human rights, but concerned about realistic outcomes. Also agree with the rural intentionality recommendation and to eradicate the local connection, which will give more flexibility.

##### Sean Bendle (Llamau)

Unfortunately Llamau's PowerPoint wasn't working, but the slides will be circulated after. Sean gave background and context to Llamau's work, as well as information about how the White Paper came to fruition – starting with an Expert Panel commissioned by Crisis. Spoke about Llamau's agreements with proposals in the paper and recommendations:

Agree with the abolition of priority need, get rid of intentionality and heavily modify the local connection test.

Outlined key provisions relevant to the group: strengthening corporate parenting responsibilities, 16-17 year old temporary accommodation, prohibiting homelessness as a way out of care or youth justice. Also looks at prevention duties and when they are triggered, as well as the debate around whether 16-17 year olds should be occupation contract holders.

##### Beth Galivan (Youth and Engagement co-ordinator with Llamau)

Beth has been delivering a consultation with young people around their thoughts on homelessness and the White Paper. Wanted to make aware that the work was ongoing and that these are the details right now, but they may change over time.

Abolishing the priority need. None of the you none of the young people have agreed with that proposal . Concern it would create another barrier for them to access a need.

Intentionality. Mixed responses from young people. Lots of questions around the idea of who deserves the help. Beth said that those involved are very aware of how much housing is in demand, and many of them said they felt they were in a competition culture for resources. There was reluctance to move them because of the idea that it could further prevent them getting support.

Locality. Made the point that the paper is not proposing abolishing local connection, just amending it. There are various reasons why young people want different areas. : escaping violence, poverty, abuse, education and employment opportunities, childcare duties, toxic family environment, bullying. Llamau was advocating for this change, wanting all young people under 25 to be exempt .

New duty to identify and refer: positive response from youth. Said about importance of including education, worried about a lack of interaction between services for example, police, social workers etc

Legislation is not the answer, important to change culture.

School is a safe place for them and potential in education as a homeless prevention tool because of relationships that build within the environment. Concern raised about the education part not being in the paper.

Proposal to occupation contract holders for 16-17 year old (have own tenancy) : 50% said no, 25% said yes, 25% said not sure – 50/50 split. A Lot more work that needs to be done around it to ensure effective implementation, eg regulations.

16-17 year olds more broadly – most we spoke to were care experience. What can be done to strengthen corporate parentings responsibilities? Answers were simple – listen, hear, acknowledge. Felt support was too generalise and prescriptive, needed to be more individual. Sometimes not enough support given to family unit. Talk of resources and lack of – shaping to the.

Giving care experience people preference – 65% agreed that the proposal was a good odea, just over 30% didn't agree.

#### Jennie Bibbings (Senedd researcher)

Jennie was involved in the Expert Panel Review before the White Paper. She wanted to bring a focus on to factual reporting, and how there were big difference in what was in the Expert Panel Review and the recommendations that were put forward by the white paper. For example, Expert Panel Review said that care experienced individuals should have more preference in housing, even if they're not homeless; they should not have to become homeless to get a home.

Additionally, White Paper doesn't mention anything about locality in normal housing allocations where the individual is not facing homelessness – this is a concern.

Jane Dodds to Beth Galivan – how many people did you ask, and how many people were care experienced?

Beth – between 10-15 young people asked, 5-10% were care experienced.

Focus group 4-5 care experience people supported by Voices From Care

Survey responses – 4 care experience people

Jane Dodds made the point that even though the majority were not care experienced, they wanted to support them.

Sharon Lovell to Beth Galivan

Following on from the comment that education was not in the statutory duty, concerned about youth work. Youth work is under the portfolio of education.

Beth Galivan response

There wasn't anything in the duty that specified youth workers, so if youth workers are coming under education, they are not included in the process.

Sharon said that she will check this with officials in Welsh Government.

Actions discussed.

Jane Dodds to Sean Bendle and Beth Galivan

How will you move forward on this work?

Sean and Beth respond that they are responding on numerous occasions on behalf of care experienced people and continuing to build evidence around this. Jane suggested that we should get government ministers along to listen, everyone agreed.

Discussion around actions on raising awareness on the issue, questions asked about how this can be done, Jane mentioned involving the CYPE Committee.

Sian Thomas (Senedd Researcher), mindful no answering for members, yes to the committee likely to respond to the issue as they have already considered the homeless paper and its implications on care experienced children. It shared similar concerns around what the Expert Panel said and how the White Paper didn't follow, including the idea of care experienced young people forming a sixth category of priority.

Conversation between the group about getting in touch with the committee around what they can do to listen and respond, querying the idea of a small inquiry in this Senedd term.

## **6. Actions on Homelessness White Paper**

1. Sharon Lovell to check with officials in Welsh Government as to where youth worker, under education, are included in the statutory duty
2. Sharon Lovell to ask Education Minister on allocation of money to local authorities and youth homelessness officers
3. Write to the chair of CPYE and Housing Committee – is there possibility that they can work together to form a short inquiry in youth and homeless

4. Helen Mary Jones and Phoebe Jenkins (Jane Dodds staff member) to create a short formal response to the Homelessness White Paper consultation before it ends in January
5. Jane Dodds to raise, either through a letter or Siambur, why is education not in the statutory duty in the White Paper
6. Jane Dodds to write a letter to the Housing Minister and Minister of Social Care asking why they have gone against the expert panel, what is the rationale and evidence behind this change in decision?

## **7. Governance model for the Children's Commissioner**

Discussion around recent cover in the press around the Children's Commissioner questioning her role if the government won't listen. Research given out prior to meeting, Jane Dodds asked the group for initial thoughts on the role and what we can do to get to a point to change things. Helen Mary Jones provided a brief description of appointment in Wales at Jane Dodds' request. Sharon Lovell wanted to know why a change was being rejected if there was constant call for its change, and Sian Thomas said that the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee was doing work around the topic.

### **Actions**

7. Write formally to the Children's Commissioner to get their view on how it is appointed as well as powers and governance.

## **8. AOB**

Jane Dodds, as Chair, said that this will not be in the agenda as of next year as there is a lot to cover.

Sharon Lovell said that Chair of the CPYE committee has asked for a response on the radical reform update yesterday, but that she had seen no response (see actions)

Jane Dodds shared concern around unregistered placements and DoLS following Andrew McFarlane's announcement that this will no longer go to court because of capacity. Concern here with oversight and how this will be challenged.

### **Other Actions**

8. Helen Mary Jones, Sharon Lovell and Jane Dodds to work together on a response to the unregistered placements and DoLS in courts, in response to the announcement about changed to court procedures.
9. Write formally to the Minister, copying in the Chair of the CYPE committee, in order to ascertain the position on the recommendations on the radical reform, and circulate this letter with the committee.
10. Helen Mary Jones and Phoebe Jenkins to liaise a time for a meeting in late January/February to create a core group focusing on the new Children's Act.
11. Helen Mary Jones and Phoebe Jenkins to before consultation ends on 15<sup>th</sup> January

The meeting was closed, Jane Dodds thanked everyone for their commitment inside and outside of the group.

Moving forward, focusing on:

- Statutory advocacy
- Unregulated and regulated placements
- Beginning the work towards a new act for babies children and young people. ESJ have called for a specific minister – we want to see this taken forward.

Next meeting:

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February