

# Evaluation of homelessness services to young people in the secure estate

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Research aims

This research was commissioned to evaluate the National Pathway for Homelessness Services to Children and Young People in the Secure Estate – referred to as ‘the Pathway’ (Welsh Government, 2015). The research focuses on the Pathway for young people, rather than adults. The evaluation of the adult Pathway was published in June 2018 (Madoc-Jones et al, 2018).

Many homeless young people offend and are homeless upon entry into the criminal justice system, and many young people in custody are homeless on release (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2009; Maguire and Nolan, 2007). The Pathway represents a commitment by Welsh Government to ensure that housing need is addressed early and in a planned fashion, with the aim of reducing homelessness upon release. Given the removal of priority need for prison leavers, the Pathway also aims to ensure that prison leavers have equal access to the prevention and relief duties, and their corresponding ‘reasonable steps’. Furthermore, it draws together the provisions of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 with other key pieces of legislation relevant to young people leaving the secure estate, such as the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Legal Aid, Sentencing and

Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, as well as the Southwark Judgement. The Pathway was launched in December 2015<sup>1</sup>. This evaluation considers:

- how local authorities, Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), secure establishments and other stakeholders from the third sector understand and have operationalised the processes set out in the Pathway and what challenges they have faced;
- how this differs from previous arrangements and what effect it has had on stakeholders;
- the experiences of the young people who come into contact with the Pathway;
- perceived impacts on the young people's housing, re-offending and other aspects of their lives including education, training and employment; and
- examples of good practice and areas for improvement.

The primary research questions were:

**Q1.** How has the Pathway (as applies to young people in this case) been implemented by:

- local authorities (homelessness and children's services)
- YOTs
- secure establishments
- other relevant stakeholders (including from the third sector).

**Q2.** What have the initial impacts of these changes been on:

- local authorities (homelessness and children's services)
- YOTs
- secure establishments
- other relevant stakeholders (including from the third sector).

**Q3.** What initial impacts have there been on young people leaving the secure estate?

## **2. Methodology**

Before examining the specific details of the Pathway for children and young people an evidence review was completed in order to understand the Pathway within its wider legislative context. The review also considered the evidence pertaining to youth

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<sup>1</sup> Although it had been operating in a shadow form since May 2015 (Madoc-Jones et al, 2018).

homelessness and its links with crime to understand the user group and their needs.

Finally, a review of the youth resettlement literature was undertaken.

Following the evidence review, the following methodology was employed:

- semi-structured interviews with national and local stakeholders (n=65)
- online survey of stakeholders (n= 41)
- semi-structured interviews with young people (n=8)
- case studies of two young people including interviewing six stakeholders relevant to their case
- focus group with senior stakeholders (n=9)

In order to establish how the Pathway has been implemented and its initial impacts, 65 semi-structured interviews were conducted between August 2018 and January 2019, with both (1) national, strategic stakeholders (some of whom were responsible for the roll out) and (2) local, frontline stakeholders responsible for the operationalisation and delivery of the Pathway to young people. These stakeholders (from local authorities (housing options and children's services), YOTs, secure establishments and other relevant organisations including the third sector) were sampled from five YOT/local authority areas covering north, south, east and west Wales.

In addition, to maximise coverage of the stakeholder population across Wales and to provide the broadest possible understanding of the implementation and impact of the changes, a national, online survey of stakeholders was also conducted between January and April 2019, and received 41 responses.

In order to establish the impacts on young people leaving the secure estate, it was important to gain young people's views. Therefore, interviews were undertaken with seven young people in custody awaiting release and one after release allowing an understand both their expectations and their experiences. To obtain a more detailed picture of young people's journeys from custody to housing under the Pathway or otherwise, case studies were completed of two young people. For one young person interviewed in custody, interviews were conducted with their resettlement worker and the YOT worker, and for a second interviewed in the community, we conducted a focus group with four key stakeholders working with the young person – a YOT caseworker, a YOT support worker, a social services personal advisor and a social worker.

Finally, after completing the interviews and initial analysis, a focus group was held of nine senior stakeholders from youth justice, the secure estate, third sector and local government in order to feedback findings to them and to obtain their views about the findings.

The National Research Committee and the Faculty Ethics Committee at the University of South Wales provided approval for the research project before fieldwork started.

### **3. Key findings**

#### **3.1 Numbers of Young People in Custody**

There are low numbers of young people in the secure estate and even lower numbers being released with housing issues in Wales.

- The number of young people attached to a Welsh YOT, serving a custodial sentence, is now just over a third of what it was in 2012 (Youth Justice Board, 2019). There were 32 young people in custody in 2018 compared with 90 in 2012. Of these young people, only some will have a housing issue. We were able to identify eight in our study.
- Stakeholders in our study attributed these low numbers to proactive efforts by those in youth justice to divert young people from custody. Therefore, although the low numbers posed challenges for this study, overall it should be interpreted positively.

#### **3.2 Awareness of the Pathway**

There is limited awareness of the Pathway among stakeholders.

- This is partly due to its limited applicability of the Pathway, given the low number of young people being released from the secure with housing issues in Wales.

The greatest gap in understanding appears to be with which agency the duty lies and the roles of children's services and local authority housing departments.

- Some stakeholders argued that children's services have responsibility for meeting the accommodation needs of all young people leaving custody, others implied that they only have a duty for those who had Looked After status prior to custody, while others indicated there is discretion around which agency holds the duty

depending on the specific circumstances and preferences of an individual young person.

### 3.3 Delivery of the Pathway

Generally, the Pathway is being implemented as envisaged, although there are some challenges and areas for improvement.

- During pre-custody, most stakeholders agreed that housing, care and support needs are identified and documented in the pre-sentence report.
- YOTs did not always share pre-sentence reports with children's services but there was uncertainty about whether it was appropriate for them to do so.
- There was an overall consensus that planning for release began early in the process, often from reception into custody.
- Young people serving short sentences or whose housing needs changed during custody posed challenges for stakeholders as they were working within very short timescales to ensure appropriate accommodation was in place for release.
- Many local stakeholders argued that, for those in housing need, it was unrealistic to expect accommodation to be secured 66-days prior to release, although it was still useful to be notified of a young person in this situation.
- YOT and children's services stakeholders stated that referrals to local authority housing were always made on time, but housing stakeholders claimed that there were still cases (albeit rare) in which they only became aware of a young person in need on the day that they were released.

Some young people did not feel that they were involved with or kept informed of accommodation planning. None reported having been involved with or seeing any paperwork completed about their accommodation situation, nor having visited accommodation pre-release. A small number did not know where they were going to be accommodated upon release.

- Some senior stakeholders thought pre-releases could be introduced, possibly using ROTL<sup>2</sup>. However, they also recognised that the tight timeframes involved,

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<sup>2</sup> Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) means being able to leave the prison for a short time for resettlement purposes with the governor's approval; one of which is visiting post-release accommodation (Prison Reform Trust, 2015)

where there are difficulties in 'holding' accommodation (considered below), arranging a pre-release accommodation visit would be practically very difficult.

Young people who are placed in secure establishments far from their hometowns or young people who are deemed to be 'high risk' due to the nature of their conviction or complexity of their needs, are more disadvantaged than others with regard to ensuring appropriate accommodation and support upon release.

- Those located far from their hometowns suffer from difficulties in maintaining family connections and support providers visiting them in the establishments.
- Young people deemed 'high risk' often find themselves excluded from accessing supported accommodation, as providers are reluctant to accommodate them.

Supported accommodation and mediation were the two principal 'reasonable steps' considered by local authority housing departments for dealing with young people in custody threatened with homelessness.

The greatest barrier to the delivery of the Pathway is the lack of supported accommodation and problems in keeping supported accommodation placements open while awaiting a young person's release.

- Although the Pathway stipulates that a young person should be notified of where they will be accommodated at least 7 days prior to release, the difficulties in securing a place in supported accommodation means that this deadline is not always met.
- There is a mismatch between the 7day deadline stipulated by the Pathway, and youth justice processes which require accommodation to be secured approximately one month prior to release so that there is sufficient time to organise additional support, education/employment placements and to satisfy licence conditions.
- Although stakeholders unanimously agreed that a young person would never be allowed to sofa surf or sleep rough upon release, occasionally young people are released without suitable accommodation, or they move into unsuitable accommodation, which they quickly leave.

### **3.4 Accommodation Post-Custody**

Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation is still being used in some areas.

- Not all stakeholders agree that it should not be used, with some citing positive aspects.
- This is in spite of the Pathway deeming B&B accommodation unsuitable unless it is a last resort (Welsh Government, 2015a; 2016). Research has shown B&B increases the risk of reoffending and the risks to young people (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, 2016).
- However, the continued use of B&B seems to reflect the shortage of supported accommodation, as it was often used as a last resort.

There is a need for more supported accommodation, specifically accommodation that provides wrap-around, specialist support for these young people with complex needs.

- Some senior stakeholders mooted ideas of partners pooling budgets to fund this, as well as bringing high-quality B&B accommodation into the fold of supported accommodation.

### **3.5 Impact of the Pathway**

The main impact of the Pathway was felt to be the development of closer relationships between partners and helping to 'bring agencies to the table'.

- A small number of local stakeholders claimed that the main benefit of the Pathway is as a tool for holding other partners to account if they are perceived to not be fulfilling their obligations.
- That said, some of the stakeholders who were familiar with the Pathway, or who became familiar as a result of participating in the research, stated that the Pathway simply set out what was already being done.

In terms of future implementation, it was felt that structures to support multi-agency case reviews and a resettlement/housing broker would be useful developments. Moreover, there is currently no system in place to measure and monitor the impact of the Pathway.

## **4. Recommendations**

### **4.1 Increase awareness of Pathway**

- Awareness needs to be raised at both managerial and frontline level across all sectors.
- A two-page summary of the Pathway should be produced.
- All promotion and training should clarify organisations' responsibilities relating to different categories of young people (i.e. where the duty lies).
- Any promotion and training should consider how to best engage and collaborate with young people. Madoc-Jones et al (2018) also recommended training staff in principle of good offender motivation and engagement.

#### **4.2 Increase availability of 'appropriate' supported accommodation**

#### **4.3 Build on partnership working**

- Consider co-locating agencies or basing individual caseworkers in partner agencies (e.g. a YOT worker in housing options or a housing officer in the YOT).
- Create or support multi-agency structures for case reviews (in line with resettlement literature – Beyond Youth Custody, 2017; Bateman et al, 2013).

#### **4.4 Introduce a system of partnership co-ordination**

- Given confusion over ownership of the duty/lack of lead agency, concerns over timeliness of referrals and potential to improve young people's perception of engagement, pilot having a dedicated officer or resettlement/housing broker to oversee the Pathway from start to finish (also in line with resettlement literature – Beyond Youth Custody, 2017; Bateman et al, 2013).
- Monitor the timeliness of referrals (in line with Madoc-Jones et al's (2018) recommendation for the adult Pathway) in a way that is sympathetic to the challenges created by the current timeframes.

#### **4.5 Improve young people's perception of engagement and collaboration**

- Involve young people in completion of paperwork/forms.
- Always keep young people informed of destination accommodation.
- Lobby for pre-release accommodation visits (possibly through ROTL). Collaborative planning generally is also in line with the resettlement literature (Malloch et al, 2013; Hart and Thompson, 2009; Mason and Prior, 2008).

**4.6 Develop and promote a system for measuring and monitoring the impact of the Pathway**

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Report Authors: Harriet Pierpoint and Jenny Hoolachan

With the assistance of Peter Mackie, Mike Maguire, Kate Williams, Rebecca Jackson, Shelter Cymru and Helen Taylor.

Full Research Report: Pierpoint, H. and Hoolachan, J. (with the assistance of Mackie, P. Maguire, M., Williams, K., Jackson, R., Shelter Cymru and Taylor, H. (2019). Evaluation of homelessness services to young people in the secure estate. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 30/2019. Available at: <https://gov.wales/evaluation-homelessness-services-young-people-secure-estate>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

Knowledge and Analytical Services

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Tel: 0300 025 0090

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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