

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

SJR(2)-17-06(p.9)

Date: Wednesday 6 December 2006

Time: 09.30am – 12.30pm

Venue: Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Paper to note: Visit to young person's housing consultation, Old colwyn 13.11.06 by Mark Isherwood AM and Sandy Mewies AM

There was a "massive shortage of affordable accommodation". Where were they to go?

- Disillusioned some of these young people are about the situation they are in and what is being done to help them. Several people (leavers from care) asked what was going to happen with this information, would it change anything now? A young man said he had been going to similar meetings for several years since in fact he had left care. "Nothing has been done, nothing has changed, and will this make any difference?" he asked.
- When asked where there any good points they wanted to make about services provided the first, majority answer, was "there isn't one". When pushed individuals referred to individual support from Youth Choices, Voices from Care, through NACRO and Social Services Pathways team, and the Leaving Care team. In the notes provided Noddfa was criticised for being inconsistent in rules, dirty, offering little help with move-on.
- Even if they were able to obtain secure hostel accommodation, "where is the move-on?" and Aahortage of move-on accommodation was a general concern.
- Help from Cymdeithas Tai Hafan and from Conwy County Borough Council's Social Service 'Pathways Team' was identified as 'positive'.
- Cymdeithas Tai Hafan was identified as "good" housing (young women).
- However, there is no 'Tai Hafan' equivalent for young men.
- A young woman stated that her Social Worker had told her about Tai Hafan and given her the forms. However, she received no support from Social Services once she had been accommodated. Her Social Worker had not told her that she wouldn't be contacted again – "as far as Conwy were concerned, they didn't know where I was living after that".
- The Housing Support from Conwy was 'poor', with people 'moving on and on'. It was therefore hard to keep tabs on them.
- A young woman stated that she had found it a problem proving to the County Council that she had been a victim of violence – especially when this happened for a second time. This was despite being "on the streets" after receiving death threats. The Council said that she was "intentionally homeless".
- Being labelled "intentionally homeless" (often for minor 'disruptive' behaviour in 'Bed and Breakfast' accommodation) made it very difficult to help them.
- They were put in 'Bed and Breakfast' accommodation by Conwy Housing Services. Their

only alternative was 'on the street'. It was 'dirty', 'damp' and 'totally unsupported'. They were forced to mix with 'lots of addicts and people just out of prison'. It was not appropriate for medical needs (e.g. epilepsy). There was a lack of showers, toilets, cooking facilities and disabled access. Some 'B & B's' either would not take, or were unsuitable for, babies/children.

- Living in b and b is costly because of the lack of cooking (no healthy diet option) and laundry facilities.
- Not many landlords will accommodate young people – and 'they know they have control (evil)'.
- There is 'not much you can get if you are under-25' (lower Housing Benefit - ?44 p.w.).
- Landlords were being paid ?35 - ?40 per night for 'B & B' accommodation. By contrast, if Housing Benefit was increased to ?70 p.w. the young people could find a flat for themselves. They would not then need to be homeless. This would be balanced by savings on 'B & B'.
- 'Landlords are in a very powerful position'.
- If the young people were in 'B & B', they had to go out to buy a hot meal each day – but there was little money to pay for this.
- There was no young person-specific or mixed hostel accommodation.
- Young women with children found it very hard to get accommodation; no hostels in the area cater for them and landlords are reluctant to take them.
- A member of the group with a disability said the lack of accommodation catering for those with disabilities was appalling. There was a lack of privacy as well as of suitable adaptations and facilities.
- Conwy County Borough Council was looking at the new provision of 12-bed supported accommodation and a 5-bed property for 'move-on'. However, there was lots of opposition and 'nimby-ism' and they were struggling to get it through.
- The 'Bond ' Scheme/cash deposit was available to them – but they had no money to pay rent in advance.
- Loans for deposits are available and bonds for rent but accommodation-seekers are not given the money "up-front". This works against them in several ways. Landlords realise their situation e.g., care leavers when they have to wait for the cash and sometimes will not accept people in their situation; accommodation is often gone by the time the money is available.
- Because they would only qualify for a loan (via Benefits Office) if they were on benefits, they had no chance of a loan if they tried to go to college.
- Unless you were a parent, there was no Housing Benefit if you tried to go to college.
- One member of the group had got on to a college course with campus accommodation but had to give up the accommodation because he was temporarily injured and had to leave the course. He had been supported by social services in applying for grants and appreciated this. There is a problem for single young people accessing housing benefit when in College.
- Several of the young people had been 'on the streets' or 'stayed with mates' after 'messing up'.
- The only Night Shelter left in North Wales was in Rhyl (in Denbighshire). This had only 8 bed-spaces. It opened at 4p.m. and operated on a 'first come, first served' basis. There was a problem if the young people had children. Males and females were put in different rooms. There were no problems with this if there were 4 of each, but if 5 males or 5 females turned up first, none of the opposite sex would be allowed in.
- The next Night Shelters' were in Chester or Liverpool.

- Increased numbers of young people were presenting as homeless.
- Mediation and early intervention was needed at an earlier stage – going into schools and working with families before homelessness happens at 16+.
- There was a problem with people being sent, young and alone, to different towns for accommodation/'B & B'.
- NACRO provide support and advice – but they have no legal powers or access to accommodation.
- Young people have to get to Conwy to sign on as homeless and then to Colwyn Bay to obtain benefits. This created an affordability problem. If they have to find the money for this, they cannot afford to eat – especially if they are travelling from rural areas.
- There was nowhere for homeless people to go if they want/need a meal.
- NACRO provide a 'Drop-in Centre' for 3 days' per week, but there was no food.
- A Young Person's Homeless Forum was proposed to lobby local and national Politicians, raise awareness and propose solutions.
- Affordable accommodation is scarce. The point was made that the high daily cost of bed and breakfast accommodation far outweighs housing benefit which if increased would ease the situation. There is also a lack of tolerance in such situations with young people not given leeway if commit a minor anti-social act. The need for support after being found accommodation was emphasised.