

## ITV Sharp End – Interview with DMSS – Support for young care leavers

Date and time	Monday 22 January 2024 12:00-12:10/15
Location and format	Pre-record Zoom links to come on 22.01
Interviewer	Redacted – Section 40
Lead Press officer	Redacted – Section 40
Interview Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the Welsh Government doing to make the transition to adulthood easier for care leavers?</li><li>• What support is available for young care leavers and future care leavers?</li><li>• What needs to be done further to address the issues faced by young people leaving care, such as homelessness and economic inactivity?</li></ul>
Top Messages to get out	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The Welsh Government is committed to supporting care leavers as they make the transition into adulthood. We recognise the difficulties that young people encounter upon leaving care, and the significant barriers in achieving a successful transition.</li><li>2. We want to see care-experienced children and young people thrive and grow, cared for and supported, and go on to achieve their full potential. We are committed to achieve that and have listened to and collaborated with the children and young people to understand how we can do it.</li><li>3. We are committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable in our society are supported and the rights of children and young people in Wales, are strengthened.</li></ol>

### Q&A

***What is the Welsh Government doing/what practical support is available to make the transition to adulthood easier for care leavers?***

#### **Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales Pilot**

- Care leavers have the right to be properly supported as they develop into independent young adults.
- Care leavers face unique challenges. They are disproportionately disadvantaged and statistically more likely to experience issues such as homelessness, addiction, and mental health issues than their peers.
- They are over-represented in the criminal justice system with **over 25% of the adult prison population having previously been in care**. This pilot will provide greater support to this cohort as they transition to adulthood whilst also testing the principles of basic income as a mechanism for delivering this support.

## The Scheme

- The Basic Income Pilot was set up to enhance the support available to young people as they leave care, whilst assessing the impact that the transition out of care to adulthood, has on them.
- It ensures that young people who take part receive all the support they need, giving them the best possible chance to have a **better, easier, and more positive transition out of care**.
- It is a uniquely bold and progressive initiative. It aspires not only to transform the lives of the young people who participate, but also to reshape international debate on basic income.
- The scheme is focused on a very specific group of care leavers – **it is not a universal basic income scheme**.
- Throughout the pilot I have been delighted to have the opportunity to hear from young people who are benefitting from the scheme themselves, and the positive impact it has had.
- The pilot scheme has been running for almost 18 months. Young people, leaving care, who turned 18 between 1 July 2022, and 30 June 2023 were given the chance to receive a **monthly income of £1600, before tax, for 2 years**.
- In addition to the monthly basic income, recipients can also access financial advice that is designed and tailored to build their confidence in the world outside of care.
- During the 12-month enrolment period, which ended on 30 June 2023, **more than 600 young people leaving care** in Wales joined the pilot and started receiving their basic income payments.
- The provisional uptake rate of 97% is significantly high – **A higher take-up rate than that of other opt in basic income schemes worldwide**.

## Evaluation of the pilot

- A multifaceted evaluation of the pilot is underway, which will consider how the pilot has been implemented, and what the effects have been on the young care leavers, but also the costs and benefits to the wider society.
- It will take years for the true impact of the scheme on the lives of young care leavers, to be assessed.
- We have commissioned an expert team, led by the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre at Cardiff University to lead the wide-ranging evaluation of the pilot.
- This team of world experts in complex evaluation, basic income, social care, and social security interventions will assess how the pilot was experienced and delivered, as well as the costs and benefits to wider society.
- We expect the evaluation will contribute to international evidence on basic income and interventions to support young people leaving care.
- The evaluation team will produce a series of thematic reports to be published over the course of the four-year research programme and the first report of the evaluation is due to be published in early 2024.

## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

- In line with our Nation of Sanctuary approach, we want to ensure that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are supported to rebuild their lives. Enabling eligible young people to participate in the Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales pilot supports this ambition.
- **Care experienced unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have always been included as eligible for the Basic Income pilot** as category three care leavers. Eligibility has not changed.
- These young people are not illegal migrants – they have a right to claim asylum in the UK. We know that a number of former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children participating on the Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales pilot have already been granted leave to remain since joining the pilot.

#### Notes

- Pilot day-to-day management provided by local authority Social Service departments and leaving care teams. Welsh Government policy team undertake monitoring and guidance development. A third-party payment provider administers the payments.
- Single Advice Fund providers (currently Citizens Advice Cymru) provide the additional financial advice component. Voices from Care Cymru administer practitioner and recipient forums.

#### Council tax exemption for care leavers

- **If you are a care leaver, you may be exempt from paying council tax if you live in Wales and you are 18 or over but have not yet reached 25.**
- Exempting care leavers from paying council tax is one of the various ways in which we are working to support care leavers into adult life.
- The Welsh Government introduced legislation in April 2019 to exempt care leavers from council tax.
- In 2020-21, the first-time figures were available, with 493 care leavers benefitting from the exemption. This rose to 646 in 2021-22, and has continued to increase each year and **is set to reach 997 in 2024-25.**
- A series of reports commissioned by the Welsh Government were published in March 2023, looking at the impact of measures taken to alleviate pressure on vulnerable people in relation to council tax.
- The reports found agreement amongst care leavers and third-party organisations representing care leavers, that the **impact of the exemption has been of ‘significant benefit’ to young care leavers.** It also found the way the exemption was applied uniformly across councils has been welcomed.

#### Declaration on radical reform of care services for children and young people in Wales

- We are committed to **reducing the number of children and young people entering care but for those children who are in care, we want them to remain close to home so they can continue to be part of their community.**
- The focus must be on keeping families together, through early help and supportive services provided at the right time for parents and children.

- In December 2022, we held Wales's first Care Experienced Summit, bringing care-experienced young people and Welsh Ministers together to develop a radical, ambitious, and shared vision for the future.
- **The outcome of the Summit was a declaration which was developed jointly with direct input from care-experienced children and young people and Ministers** to ensure that their voices are amplified, and at the heart of the transformation of children's services.
- It commits the Welsh Government to deliver a wide range of changes to the current care system, **to enable a 'children first' approach in everything we do** and to make sure that everything is done to help children and families stay together.
- Last Spring, the FM signed the declaration, and we are committed to its delivery with a follow up Summit to be held this Spring.

### Corporate Parenting Charter

- In September, we launched our Corporate Parenting Charter. Corporate parenting is safeguarding and promoting the rights and life chances of care-experienced children and young people.
- We want everyone to feel a shared responsibility across public sector bodies, private sector and the third sector to be a corporate parent to care-experienced children and young people as we know health, education, housing, and other bodies all have a part to contributing to them flourishing and thriving.
- The Charter sets out principles that all public bodies and their leaders should follow in the design and delivery of services, such as eradicating stigma, providing a stable home and good health and education.
- The FM and Permanent Secretary have signed the Charter on behalf of Welsh Ministers and Welsh Government.
- We are encouraging all public bodies, voluntary organisations and businesses in Wales to join us to ensure that all care-experienced children and young people have the same opportunities and life chances that every young person deserves.

### Addressing homelessness

- We have published the **Care Leavers Accommodation and Support framework**, which was developed specifically for young people leaving care in Wales.
- The framework is designed to ensure care leavers have the flexible support they need so that no care experienced person falls through the cracks.
- As a result of our investment of **over £3.1m in the Youth Homelessness Innovation Fund, over 20 projects providing new and innovative housing and support** approaches to vulnerable young people aged 16-25 at risk of becoming homeless or currently homeless are operational across Wales.
- We want to end all forms of homelessness and believe that where it cannot be prevented, it should be **rare, brief, and unrepeated**.
- Record levels of funding for homelessness prevention – **over £210m** this year alone and we have been able to protect this funding despite the challenging budgetary position.

- This will be used to provide support at the earliest opportunity, focus on prevention and help ensure homes are suitable.
- Social housing remains a key priority as reflected in our commitment to deliver 20,000 additional homes for rent in the social sector this government term, and we have allocated record levels of investment to achieve this.
- **Prevention** remains the focus and priority to reduce the flow of people needing temporary accommodation.
- Welsh Government have provided an additional **£6m** to Local Authorities for a **Discretionary Homelessness Prevention Fund** - It is an invest to save fund and can be used flexibly by local authorities to try and help keep someone in their own home or quickly relieve homelessness – including helping with rent arrears, rent guarantees, other household bills for example.
- **Prioritising investment in more homes**, to support move-on of people, particularly children and families out of TA, particularly B&B and hotel accommodation.

## Notes

- **The £210m referred to includes a £15m increase to the homelessness prevention budget** in the current financial year, and **£3.7m in the Youth Support Grant** to identify young people at risk of becoming homeless at an earlier stage to ensure they are given the support required to prevent it.
- The **Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP)** was established to quickly bring forward more good quality longer term accommodation at pace to respond to the increasing pressures on temporary accommodation. In its first year, the Programme provided £76.4m to Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords to bring forward 936 homes.

## Economic inactivity amongst care leavers

- The Economy Minister recently unveiled his Economic Mission which includes a national priority area to provide a platform for young people, fair work, skills, and success.
- We will be backing young people to achieve the ambitious futures in Wales, prioritising their skills and creativity and we will target resources where they are most needed, with help for those furthest from the labour market.
- We want young people to thrive and grow by accessing the right employment or education opportunities at the right time and **the Welsh Government's Young Person's Guarantee provides everyone between 16 and 25 in Wales with the offer of support to gain a place in education, training, or an apprenticeship, find a job or become self-employed.**
- **Over 27,000** young people have started employability and skills programmes alone since the launch of the **Young Person's Guarantee** in November 2021
- We know that young people value work experience opportunities, access to transport and mental health and wellbeing support as key provisions for them to access the job, education or training they want.
- We are working to equip our young people with the skills for now and the future and providing support to remove barriers to access employment opportunities. This includes linking with businesses to ensure that we are creating the workforce to access job opportunities and to ensure that these skills are built across the curriculum.

- Creating a platform for young people, fair work, skills and success will include delivering mental health and wellbeing support to overcome barriers which hold young people back from accessing employment and education opportunities.

### **Mental health**

- We are committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of care experienced children and young people.
- **Our Regional Integration Fund prioritises £18.9 million** to support families to stay together safely and offer therapeutic support which improves and enhances the wellbeing of care experienced children and young people.

### **Substance misuse/Addiction**

- We are committed to supporting Children and Young people including care experienced children and young people with substance misuse issues.
- Substance misuse is a major health issue affecting individuals, families and communities and tackling substance misuse continues to be a priority for the Welsh Government.
- **We currently invest over £67m in our substance misuse agenda**, of which over £39m goes to our Area Planning Boards through our Substance Misuse Action Fund. These allocations will increase by a further £2m in 2024-25. **This figure includes a £5.25m ring-fenced allocation for children and young people to ensure the delivery of frontline services.** This funding will **increase by a further £1m to £6.25m in 2024-25.**
- Children of those affected by ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) are at increased risk of exposing their own children to ACEs, creating a cycle of harm, which early intervention needs to focus on breaking. We have set clear actions with our partners within the Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019-2022 to ensure services are joined up and effective for families, in particular those who are on the edge of care.
- The Welsh Government **will publish a Substance Misuse Treatment Framework for Children and Young People, expected in early 2024.** The Framework summarises evidence and best practice to guide those supporting Children and Young People with substance misuse issues.

### **Other hot topics**

#### **Background**

**Redacted – not in scope for relating to misinformation, public messaging strategy, or reputational risk**