

Communities and Local Government Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0PW

5 September 2016

Dear Sir or Madam,

YMCA response to the Communities and Local Government Committee inquiry into the Homelessness Reduction Bill

YMCA was established in 1844 and is the largest and oldest youth charity in the world, helping over 58 million people in 119 countries.

Here in England and Wales, 133 YMCAs work to transform over 660 different communities, impacting on the lives of nearly 600,000 people every year.

YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

In seeking to fulfil this role, YMCA is the largest charitable provider of supported housing for young people in England and Wales – providing just fewer than 11,000 beds every night. YMCA offers a wide range of housing; from emergency beds through to supported longer-term accommodation.

Last year alone YMCA housed an estimated 15,000 people in its supported housing schemes. YMCA supported housing is primarily targeted at young people who are unable to live independently and need both accommodation and support. This includes young people who are homeless, those leaving care and young people with additional support needs such as mental health difficulties and substance use issues.

Our philosophy of supporting young people holistically means that YMCA not only provides a bed but also seeks to help a young people gain the training, skills and confidence to go on to lead independent lives and contribute to society.

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SUPPORT & ADVICE

ACCOMMODATION

FAMILY WORK

HEALTH & WELLBEING

TRAINING & EDUCATION

1. Introduction

1.1 YMCA welcomes the Homelessness Reduction Bill, the change to the legislation is overdue given that the current framework in England has fallen behind that in place in Scotland and Wales.

1.2 The following sections of the response provide some initial perspectives on the Homelessness Reduction Bill and the key proposed amendments to the Housing Act 1996.

2. Redefining who is classified as homeless to include more people who are threatened with losing their home

2.1 YMCA recognise that there has been sharp rise in the proportion of people becoming homeless as a result of the end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy and that appropriate action needs to be taken to both nationally and locally to arrest this trend.

2.2 Redefining within legislation who is classified as homeless to include those likely to become homeless within 56 days and those in possession a valid Section 21 Notice would hopefully go some way to achieving this.

2.3 However for young people, who currently make up just over a fifth of households that are homeless and in priority need, this alone would be unlikely to significantly reduce the numbers of this age group becoming homeless or presenting to local authorities in more immediate need.


2.4 Evidence obtained by YMCA from Local Authorities in our '*Uncertain Futures*' report published in 2016, reveals that 55% of those 18 to 21-year-olds who were accepted as being homeless last year became homeless as a result of their relatives or friends no longer being willing or able to house them, with a further 15% becoming homeless as a result of a relationship breakdown.

2.5 Given the primary reasons for these individuals losing their home, redefining who is classified as homeless to include more people who are threatened with losing their home would be unlikely to significantly benefit this age group.

3. Expanding the duties on local authorities to provide information and advice

3.1 For the reasons outlined in the previous section, the extension of the duties on local authorities to provide information and advice would likely be the key element of the Bill that would potentially prevent young people from becoming homeless.



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- 3.2** YMCA currently sees too many young people go without adequate information and advice when they present to local authorities in their time of need. In addition and the fall in numbers of young people being considered statutory homeless is not being matched by demand YMCAs are seeing locally for its housing services.
 - 3.3** Setting down in legislation the types of information and advice that will need to be delivered by local authorities, alongside the requirement to provide all applicants with an assessment and personal housing plan, would be a positive step in ensuring young people are aware of their rights and the support available to them.
 - 3.4** However given many people's first experience of homelessness occurs when they are young, it is important that early opportunities to provide them with suitable information and advice are appropriately seized upon so as to support them sufficiently and prevent more severe problems occurring later on.
 - 3.5** To achieve this and ensure these individuals do not miss out, YMCA would like to see the Bill go further by expressly naming young people as a specific group who should be targeted for support and advice, alongside groups such as people leaving prison or youth detention accommodation, young people leaving care and those accessing mental health services in the community.
 - 3.6** Naming young people within the Bill would help ensure that information and advice services are designed with them in mind and address the particular reasons this group become homeless and their specific support needs.
 - 4. Introducing a duty to provide accommodation to people who have nowhere safe to stay**
 - 4.1** Introducing a duty that means people who have nowhere safe to stay are provided with emergency housing would be an important step towards tackling the growing numbers of people who are forced to sleep rough.
 - 4.2** However, last year almost nine out of ten YMCAs had to turn away individuals in need of housing or place them waiting lists due to being at capacity, demonstrating in part the shortfall of appropriate accommodation that currently exists across the country.
 - 4.3** So while the proposed new duty would be seen as a positive step in preventing people from sleeping rough, given the existing pressures to find appropriate housing, additional investment would be necessary for this to be successful.
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4.4 Measures would also need to be put in place to ensure that the emergency accommodation that is provided, whether operated by the public, private or voluntary sector is appropriate for the individuals being housed, and the additional needs that young people have are accounted for to provide them with somewhere safe and secure to live.

If you require any further information or have any follow-up questions regarding our response, please do not hesitate to get in touch using the contact details included.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Denise Hatton'.

Denise Hatton

Chief Executive

YMCA England

