

Local Government and Communities Committee

Homelessness

Submission from LGBT Scotland

About LGBT Youth Scotland

LGBT Youth Scotland is the largest youth and community-based organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Scotland. The charity's mission is to empower lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people and the wider LGBT community so that they are embraced as full members of the Scottish family at home, school and in every community. The evidence within this document comes from the organisation's experience working with LGBT young people for over 25 years, from our consultation with LGBT young people, and the work of the LGBT Youth Commission on Housing and Homelessness. We have read and agree to the Policy on Treatment of Written Evidence by Subject and Mandatory Committees and are happy for this organisational response to be made public.

Overview

Since July 2016, LGBT Youth Scotland has supported a group of LGBT young people (ages 16-25) to form a youth commission on housing and homelessness. The commission has researched LGBT young people's experiences of homelessness to understand the relationship between homelessness and abuse (both domestic and familial), and worked with services to raise awareness of LGBT young people's barriers and needs. The main issues that arise in relation to housing and homelessness for LGBT young people, whether in relation to risks to becoming homeless, accessing homelessness support, or maintaining housing, are largely linked to experiences of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia:

- Experiencing abuse in the family home in relation to sexual orientation or gender identity
- Experiencing abuse in the family home or within an intimate relationship and not feeling comfortable disclosing the abuse to services
- Not feeling confident to access a service or come out to service providers due to fears of a discriminatory response
- Fears or experiences of being accommodated in gender-inappropriate spaces when accessing temporary accommodation
- Experiencing discrimination or harassment from fellow service users or accommodation providers in temporary accommodation
- Experiencing hate crime or harassment from neighbours once in tenancy

Housing Options & Homelessness Prevention

LGBT young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness face several barriers to benefiting from homelessness prevention and housing options, which include: not being aware of their rights; fear of services; not coming out to services; and, not being asked about their LGBT identities.

The LGBT Youth Commission on Housing and Homelessness undertook a consultation with over 100 LGBT young people from 8 youth groups in 7 local authorities, and at LGBT Youth Scotland's National Youth Summit. The consultation identified that LGBT young people are not aware of their housing rights, how to access support, or the fact that they could be deemed 'intentionally homeless' if they left home voluntarily.

Many LGBT young people in the consultation said that they would access support through youth work organisations rather than approaching homelessness services or local councils. Two organisations were named explicitly several times across the consultation groups as places that LGBT young people would never go for support due to the organisations' anti-LGBT reputation and political actions. LGBT young people were reluctant to access services through their local council and expressed concerns over being fearful of the process, unhelpful or judgmental staff from previous experiences, and the layout of buildings.

- "They are terrifying"
- "Very unhelpful, judged"
- "Too many questions, long lists, only high priority"
- Open plan consultation areas deter young people from sharing their experiences. particularly in relation to their LGBT identities.

Not feeling comfortable to come out to services can affect LGBT young people's access to appropriate support. Family breakdown is the most common reason for young people becoming homeless, which is why mediation with the aim of returning them to the family home is recognised as the most common prevention approach used with young people¹.

Research shows that 69% of homeless LGBT young people experienced violence, abuse or rejection from family prior to becoming homeless, and that 77% believe that being LGBT was a causal factor in their homelessness². LGBT young people don't always feel comfortable being 'out' to services, so may not give full reasons as to

¹ Harleigh-Bell, N. (2016) *Youth Homelessness in Scotland 2015: An Overview of Youth Homelessness Services in Scotland*. Homeless Action Scotland.

² Bateman, W. (2015) *LGBT Youth Homelessness: UK National Scoping Exercise*. Albert Kennedy Trust.

www.akt.org.uk/webtop/modules/repository/documents/AlbertKennedy_researchreport_FINALinteractive.pdf

why they left home and may not report homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic abuse from family or abuse from an intimate partner. There are a limited number of services available to support GBT men who experience abuse and in many areas, the only way to escape an abusive relationship is to leave and access homelessness support. While those under the age of 18 can legally apply for council housing, some areas will not allocate housing to this group. LGBT young people may be independent far earlier than this.

Without feeling safe to come out and discuss the abusive or unsafe environment they've left, the following issues may arise for LGBT young people:

- They run the risk through mediation of being returned to a home where they may experience abuse, violence, or rejection in response to their LGBT identities.
- If they are leaving an abusive relationship and do not discuss their relationship or the abuse with staff because they are fearful of coming out, services will not be aware that they're experiencing domestic abuse.
- As a result of not coming out in or explaining more about their home situations, such as in the aforementioned examples, LGBT young people may be deemed intentionally homeless and not provided with the support needed.

Appropriate Accommodation

The youth commission consultation found that LGBT young people are concerned that they may be provided temporary accommodation that is inappropriate for their gender identity. There were particular concerns around accessing shelters and group accommodation. Some youth homelessness support services only accommodate single gender groups; with a lack of training and understanding of transgender identities amongst support staff, young trans people may experience prejudice and discrimination from other service users or staff and volunteers. Non-binary young people are also unable to access gendered services as they do not feel safe, supported or included in these services.

“Trans people may not feel safe in gendered shelters”

“There is nowhere for non-binary people to go.”

“There are no domestic abuse services for men or non-binary people”

Once given tenancy, LGBT young people face the same barriers frequently faced by young people, such as poverty, low paid employment, or low levels of life skills. They can also, however, face barriers to sustaining a tenancy due to experiencing hate crime or prejudice and discrimination within communities. Individuals reporting harassment from neighbours for being LGB or T need to come out in the process and they may fear coming out to landlords in case they experience further

discrimination or are blamed for the harassment. Research found that LGBT people often felt that their housing needs and concerns were not given value and that housing authorities would not acknowledge, record or understand the importance of a homophobic, biphobic or transphobic incident³.

Good Practice and Service Improvement

The youth consultation highlighted that LGBT young people feel safer and more supported to come out to a service that is visibly LGBT-inclusive and makes clear statements on LGBT inclusion. Young people from across Scotland, for instance, stated that they would access services from Rock Trust, despite the fact that they only operate within the Edinburgh area. Rock Trust has achieved the LGBT Charter and is very vocal about not only the achievement but the value of the process of reflecting on their policies and practices to ensure that they're LGBT-inclusive. Other places named by LGBT young people included a wide range of third sector organisations.

The youth commission also undertook a consultation with 22 professionals from across the housing and homelessness sector at a national homelessness conference, 3 domestic abuse organisations, and 1 youth homelessness organisation. The professionals identified the following issues:

- Access to LGBT awareness training varied across services and none of the professionals had received training on LGBT people's experiences of domestic abuse.
- There are inconsistent approaches to recording equalities monitoring data around sexual orientation, gender identity, and transgender identities.
- The unreliable data is a barrier to providing a service that responds to the specific needs of LGBT young people.
- Professionals across the housing and homelessness sector rated their confidence to support LGBT people in their service as very low. Those who scored themselves higher had received LGBT training, including those from organisations who are working towards or have achieved the LGBT Charter.

Considering inconsistency across Scotland's services in the areas of LGBT-inclusive messaging, support, and training, and varying staff confidence, the following changes would greatly improve service responses to LGBT young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless:

- A National Homelessness Strategy for Scotland that recognises the role discrimination plays in increasing the risk of LGBTI young people becoming homeless.

³ *Safe and Secure? LGBT Experiences of Social Housing in Scotland* (2007). LGBT Housing Project: LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing, Stonewall Scotland, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/lgbt_housing_report.pdf

- Awareness-raising for young people in regards to their rights and services available, with information on each protected characteristic and specific barriers and experiences. This should include clear discussion on intentional homelessness and the importance of explaining to service staff the full circumstances around leaving home.
- Staff in the housing and homelessness sector to receive LGBT awareness training, and ensure that their domestic abuse training is LGBT-inclusive. This must include staff in any emergency accommodation provided in partnership.
- Promotion of services which are inclusive, reassuring potential service users that they accept and support LGBT young people within their services.

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