ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
OUR THANKS TO EVERY HOMELESSNESS ORGANISATION AND LOCAL AUTHORITY WHO TOOK PART IN THE RESEARCH, AND TO THE NATIONAL YOUTH REFERENCE GROUP

PUBLISHED
DECEMBER 2012
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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS BY THE NATIONAL YOUTH REFERENCE GROUP

The National Youth Reference Group (NYRG) is made up of young people aged 16-25 from across England who are homeless or have experienced homelessness. The group exists to assist national and local government, and homelessness organisations to develop and improve their involvement opportunities for young people. The NYRG were asked to provide a summary of key findings from this report that would be accessible for other young people. The NYRG have also made recommendations, see page 38.

- Evidence says more young people are becoming homeless

- Most young people become homeless through relationship breakdown with their family, friends or partner

- Some charities do not have enough room to house all young people who come to them when homeless

- Organisations and services that young people need are being closed because of funding cuts

- Not all councils have suitable emergency accommodation for young people and some are still being placed in Bed and Breakfests, making them more vulnerable

- Many councils don’t have shared accommodation options for young people
KEY FINDINGS

Our research shows that homelessness amongst young single people persists across England and provides evidence that youth homelessness is increasing in some areas.

- 51% of homelessness organisations report working with more young people aged 16-24 since 2011.
- 66% of young people supported by homelessness organisations became homeless because of relationship breakdowns with family, friends or a partner.
- 36% of homelessness organisations report mental or physical health problems increased amongst young people since 2011.
- 49% of local authorities report difficulties in joint working between Housing and Children’s Services departments to support 16 and 17 year olds.
- 55% of homelessness organisations say that capacity constraints have preventing them working with every young person referred to them in the two months before the research.
- 54% of homelessness organisations reported that youth services, run by local authorities and the voluntary sector, have closed in their areas since 2011.
- 37% of local authorities use Bed and Breakfast accommodation as emergency accommodation for young people.
- 60% of homelessness organisations say that accommodation for young people receiving support to move on to had become less available since 2011.
- 28% of local authorities have developed shared accommodation options with landlords for young people.
- 65% of local authorities reported that the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate was having a negative impact on young people’s ability to access the private rented sector.
- 47% of local authorities reported that the capping of Local Housing Allowance was having a similar impact on young people’s ability to access the private rented sector.
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

Homeless Link is the national membership body for organisations working with people who are homeless.

In December 2011 we published the findings of our first survey of youth homelessness in the Young & Homeless report. This research was undertaken after we received evidence from our regional managers that youth homelessness was increasing. This year's report updates our 2011 research. It investigates homelessness amongst young single people, who can be either statutory or non-statutory homeless.

RESEARCH AIMS

Our research investigates the nature and extent of youth homelessness in England in 2012, including:

- How many young people are being supported by homelessness organisations and being seen by local authority Housing Options teams?
- Whether the numbers of young homeless people are perceived to have increased since our 2011 research.
- What the causes of youth homelessness are and how these have changed since late 2011?
- What young people’s support needs are?
- The availability of support services for young people.
- The availability of suitable emergency and longer term move on accommodation for young people.
- The perceived impact of welfare reform and wider economic and public policy changes on young people.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

In our 2011 report, we argued that low economic growth, wide-ranging changes to the welfare system and cuts in public spending on youth services were together creating a perfect storm that would result in increased youth homelessness and severe consequences for the most vulnerable. These factors have not gone away in the last 12 months; they continue to create conditions in which young people struggle to make successful, positive transitions to adulthood. It therefore remains vital that appropriate services are in place to help young people avoid homelessness and, where this is not possible, provide them with the support and accommodation they need to achieve positive outcomes and independent living.

The economic environment in England continues to create barriers for young people. Unemployment amongst 16-24 year olds in England has fallen since 2011 (when it was 0.93 million in Q3), but remains high (0.88

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1 Homeless Link, Young & Homeless, 2011, [http://homeless.org.uk/youth-homelessness#ULTIe-0N7k](http://homeless.org.uk/youth-homelessness#ULTIe-0N7k)
2 Most statutory homeless young people are heads of households, but young people who are not pregnant or with dependent children can also be accepted as statutory homeless if they are 16-17 years old or care leavers aged 18-20. It is also possible for a young person to be statutory homeless through a specific vulnerability, such as a physical disability or mental illness.
million in Q3 of 2012; 22% of the total workforce in this age group\(^3\). The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training has also fallen since last year (by 136,000) but stood at 1.03 million in the third quarter of this year.\(^4\)

Since our 2011 report, several expected changes to the welfare system have taken place and are now having a negative impact on young people. The extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate and the lowering of Local Housing Allowance earlier this year are reducing young people’s ability to access private rented accommodation, which in many areas has become their only housing option. Reductions in household income, including through increased non-dependent deductions\(^5\), will have contributed to the breakdown in relationships that often cause youth homelessness. Further changes in the coming year, especially the overall benefit cap and the localisation of council tax benefit, are likely to apply even more pressure to already stretched household budgets. It remains to be seen what effect Universal Credit will have when it is introduced next year. The same is true of size criteria rules.\(^6\)

Reductions in services provided by the youth sector in the last 12 months as a result of cuts in local authority spending will have affected important early intervention and prevention work with young people. Whether services have closed entirely or reduced their work with young people, funding cuts are likely to have caused a loss of expertise that cannot easily be replaced. If there are further local authority spending cuts in 2013 that reduce youth services, these cuts will only magnify this effect.

In combination, these macro-level factors have made the transition to adulthood fraught with challenges for young people, and make preventing and tackling youth homelessness harder. What works in preventing and reducing youth homelessness is well known\(^7\), but in the prevailing economic and social environment it will not be easy to put in place the elements required. These include affordable accommodation, flexible support, integrated working within local authorities and between homelessness organisations, specialist help for complex needs, and high quality advice and guidance.

“Changes in the benefit regime are disproportionately affecting young people’s ability to access a safety net. With youth unemployment high and benefit sanctions becoming harsher, the prospects look bleak for a lot of young people.” (Homelessness organisation [HO], West Midlands)


\(^4\) Department for Education. *NEET Statistics – Quarterly Brief, Q3 2012*. [http://education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/datasets/a00215766/neet-statistics-quarterly-brief-quarter-3-2012](http://education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/datasets/a00215766/neet-statistics-quarterly-brief-quarter-3-2012). These official figures include some groups who are not of concern, such as young people on a gap year.

\(^5\) Non-dependent deductions are reductions made to a household’s Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit in respect of a household member who shares the accommodation but is not dependent on the household for financial support. The level of the deduction has increased annually since 2011 thus putting greater pressure on households with young people who are classed as non-dependents.

\(^6\) From April 2013 households may need to make a calculation about whether they are better off with a non-dependent deduction rather than a deduction to housing benefit as a result of under occupation of social housing.

\(^7\) See *Developing positive accommodation and support pathways to adulthood: minimising the risks of youth homelessness and supporting successful transitions for young people*, [http://www.stbasils.org.uk/aboutus#resources](http://www.stbasils.org.uk/aboutus#resources)
THE HOMELESSNESS CONTEXT

The homelessness sector is facing deep challenges. Our on-going monitoring of funding for the sector reveals that a majority of organisations supporting homeless people in England had a cut in their funding in 2011/12, on average 15%. Moreover, it is anticipated that further cuts in local authority spending will take place in 2013 and will put additional pressure on homelessness services. Many organisations facing reduced funding have responded by reducing frontline staff numbers, limiting the level of support they provide and becoming more selective when accepting referrals.8 There is evidence that downwards pressure on salaries is affecting the skills and quality of staff in the sector.9 The number of bed spaces available in supported housing has been falling since January 2010, largely as a result of the permanent closure of accommodation projects.

However, as outlined in our 2011 report, there are a number of reasons to believe that there are opportunities to lessen the worst effects of policy and funding changes on the provision of support for homeless people. There continues to be a cross-Government commitment to preventing and tackling homelessness, including youth homelessness. The latest report from the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness highlights a youth accommodation pathway that focuses on prevention and highlights partnership working between local authorities and homelessness organisations to meet young people’s needs.10 The Government has also committed to providing £160 million over the next two years for the Homeless Prevention Grant to local authorities.

There are new funding sources for this support. The Homelessness Transition Fund, a 3-year, £20 million grants programme from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) administered by Homeless Link, is currently supporting 62 organisations with £11.6 million in grants, 5 of which are youth homelessness organisations providing emergency accommodation, access to private rented accommodation, mediation and support services for young people. Crisis has received £10.8 million funding over three years from DCLG for the Private Rented Sector Access Programme to help single homeless people find and sustain good quality accommodation in the private rented sector. The DCLG allocated just over £18.5 million to lead authorities across the country to tackle and prevent rough sleeping. The money has been allocated to groups of local authorities. Each grouping has ‘lead authorities’ who will ensure that the money is targeted in areas and on interventions that will have the highest impact across the whole grouping. Whilst this new money is a welcome addition, we remain concerned that it does not replace the amount of money currently being lost to the homelessness sector, and is not stable long term funding.

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9 Homeless Link, Who is supporting people now? (forthcoming)
FINDINGS

THE EXTENT OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Our research shows that homelessness amongst young single people persists across England and provides evidence that youth homelessness is increasing in some areas.

Homelessness organisations
The 117 homelessness organisations taking part in our research were working with a total of 6,884 young people in the calendar month prior to their completion of the survey questionnaire, which in most cases will have been September 2012.

Half of these organisations (51%) reported that the number of their clients who were aged 16-24 had increased since November 2011 (when the first Young & Homeless research was carried out); a far larger percentage than the 7% who reported that this group had decreased. Almost two fifths (39%) reported no change. Increases were reported in every English region.

Local authorities
Almost all of the local authorities taking part in our research (99 of 101) provided figures for the number of young people presenting as homeless in September 2012 (1,068), while 86 provided the numbers seeking housing advice and information (3,080) in the same month. On average each local authority had 11 presentations and 36 young people seeking advice and information in September, meaning across all authorities in England there were 3,500 presentations and around 11,500 requests for advice and information.

This calculation of approximately 15,000 young people across England becoming homeless or threatened with homelessness in September is higher than the figure we published in 2011:12,000. However, these two figures are not entirely comparable.

A larger percentage of local authorities reported that the number of young people seeking advice and information had increased since October 2011 (40%) than reported that presentations had increased (35%). Conversely, a higher percentage reported that presentations had decreased over this period (34%) than reported that advice and information requests had decreased (28%). In both cases at least a fifth of local authorities felt that the change had been no change. Increases were reported in every region, bar London, which was underrepresented in responses as a whole, with only 4 local authorities completing the survey. The reported greater increase in young people seeking advice and information than presenting as homeless may be a positive development, if it means that young people are seeking help before their housing situation reaches crisis point.

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11 In our 2011 research, 79 homelessness organisations reported working with 4,869 young people.
12 In our 2011 research, local authorities were asked one question about presentations and advice and information, while this year a separate question was asked on each. There were indications last year that some single responses did not include advice and information numbers, as not all local authorities collate this information. This remains the case in 2012 (only 86 local authorities answered this question, compared to 99 for presentations), but including a separate question on advice and information may have prompted more complete reporting and explain the higher overall number.
13 The month that local authorities provided information on in our 2011 research.
YOUNG PEOPLE’S SUPPORT NEEDS

Young homeless people commonly have a range of support needs, which can be complex. These needs may be a cause of homelessness or develop after the young person has become homeless.

The table below presents the average percentages of young people with different support needs in the homelessness organisations. Although specific figures are different this year, overall there is a striking similarity between the averages for 2011 and 2012.

Fig. 1: Average percentages of young people’s support needs reported by homelessness organisations

The chart highlights how difficult it is for young homeless people to make the transition into adulthood. A majority do not yet have all of the key skills and personal experience needed to make progress at a crucial stage in their lives; they are missing out on opportunities to learn, develop skills and move to independence. It also highlights the significant minority of young homeless people with more complex needs, such as substance misuse and mental health problems.14

“We are seeing more young people with multiple and complex needs.” (HO, South West)

This minority may be growing in number. More than 1 in 4 of the local authorities taking part in the research (29%) reported that the needs of young people presenting as homeless had become more complex since

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October 2011. There is evidence that specialist support for these young people is inadequate in some areas – see page 21.

That 1 in 4 young people supported by homelessness organisations have offending histories is significant; we believe that many young homeless people with offending backgrounds experience marginalisation. Many find themselves excluded from housing associations, private rented housing, and supported accommodation.15

**Rough sleeping**
Most of the homelessness organisations taking part in our research (85) were able to report how many of their young people had slept rough. The average was 1 in 10 young people. More than a third of these 85 organisations also reported that the numbers of young people who had slept rough had increased since November 2011 (11% reported these numbers decreased).

In our 2011 report we pointed to evidence from PrOMPT data16 that young people who sleep rough tend to do so for shorter periods of time than older homeless people. This year, to test this finding, we asked homelessness organisations about the lengths of time their clients had slept rough.

**Fig. 2: Percentage of young clients having slept rough for different periods of time (n=392 clients)**17

As the chart above shows, more than half of young people had slept rough for only 1-2 nights and over 80% had slept rough for less than 7 nights.

The local authorities taking part in the research were also asked about rough sleeping and specifically, how many young people had slept rough just before presenting as homeless. In total, across 86 authorities, just 4% of young people had been in this position. The lengths of time that these young people had slept out were similar to those reported by homelessness organisations, with the vast majority (92%) sleeping out for no more than 7 nights.

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16 Prevention Opportunities Mapping and Planning Toolkit (PrOMPT), Homeless Link, http://homeless.org.uk/prompt#.UKuG32eZh8E
17 Responses from 47 organisations.
Data from CHAIN, the London outreach recording system managed by Broadway,\(^\text{18}\) shows that since 2006/07 there has been a gradual, although inconsistent, rise in the number of people aged under 25 seen rough sleeping in the capital. The significant rise (an increase of 166%) between 2010/11 and 2011/12 shown in Figure 3 below may possibly reflect the increased outreach and assessment capability in London following the launch of No Second Night Out\(^\text{19}\) in 2011, rather than an actual increase in the number of young people sleeping rough. The ratio of young rough sleepers to all rough sleepers has remained approximately the same over the time period shown on the chart and in 2011/12 was 1:10. Almost all (91%) of these 528 young rough sleepers had never been seen rough sleeping before and just 39 appeared to be living on the streets.

**Fig. 3: CHAIN data on under 25s seen rough sleeping in London, 2006-2012**

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**Care leavers**

Leaving care can be a difficult transition and young people undergoing this process can be at risk of becoming homeless.\(^\text{20}\) However, amongst both young people receiving support and young people presenting as homeless, care leavers are a small minority. The homelessness organisations reported an average of 14.5% (of 4,798 clients), while local authorities reported 6% (of 876).

**The ages of young homeless people**

Our research shows that approximately half of young homeless people are less than 20 years old. The charts below highlight a great deal of similarity in age distribution between young people being supported by homelessness organisations and young people presenting as homeless to local authorities. In both cases,

\(^{18}\) [http://www.broadwaylondon.org/CHAIN/Reports/StreettoHomeReports.html](http://www.broadwaylondon.org/CHAIN/Reports/StreettoHomeReports.html)

\(^{19}\) No Second Night Out, [http://www.nosecondnightout.org.uk/](http://www.nosecondnightout.org.uk/)

\(^{20}\) There is evidence of a great degree of overlap between homelessness and experience of institutional care, including local authority care, amongst people using low threshold homelessness services. Fitzpatrick, S. et al, 2012, *Multiple exclusion homelessness in the UK: Overview of key findings*, [http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/MEH_Fitzpatrick_Key%20findings.pdf](http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/MEH_Fitzpatrick_Key%20findings.pdf)
around a quarter are in the 16-17 age group and are defined as being in priority need by the 2002 Homelessness (Priority need for accommodation) (England) Order, but must be jointly assessed by Housing teams and Children’s Services (see pages 18-19). These figures are very similar to the age distribution findings presented in our 2011 report.

Fig. 4: Percentage of homelessness organisation’s young clients in different age categories\(^2\) (n=3,548)

![Pie chart showing age distribution of homelessness organisation’s young clients.]

Fig. 5: Percentage of young people presenting to local authorities in different age categories in September 2012 (n=917)

![Pie chart showing age distribution of young people presenting to local authorities.]

Both the homelessness organisations and local authorities taking part in the research were asked about the numbers of young people aged under 16 who they supported or had seen. The homelessness organisations reported only 2 young people of this age and local authorities only 3.

**Change in the ages of young homeless people**

Both the homelessness organisations and the local authorities reported a certain degree of change since 2011 in the numbers of young homeless people in each of the 4 age groups presented above. The age group most reported as increased by homelessness organisations was the 16-17 year olds.

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\(^2\) In the calendar month prior to their completion of the survey questionnaire.
Amongst the local authorities, there were fewer reports of increased numbers across all of the age groups and more reports of decreases than from amongst homelessness organisations. There is a stark difference between local authorities’ assessment of how the 16-17 age group is changing and the view expressed by homelessness organisations. This may be explained by effective joint working between Housing Options and Children’s Services in local authorities, meaning that young people of this age go to the latter and will not be recorded by Housing teams.

**Fig. 7: Percentages of local authorities reporting change in age groups of young people presenting since October 2011 (n=78)**

- **22-24 years old**
  - Increased: 32%
  - Decreased: 22%
  - No change: 28%
  - Don’t know: 18%

- **20-21 years old**
  - Increased: 29%
  - Decreased: 22%
  - No change: 32%
  - Don’t know: 16%

- **18-19 years old**
  - Increased: 30%
  - Decreased: 24%
  - No change: 30%
  - Don’t know: 17%

- **16-17 years old**
  - Increased: 26%
  - Decreased: 19%
  - No change: 38%
  - Don’t know: 17%
**CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS**

The causes of young people becoming homeless are varied and often interdependent. The chart below highlights the great degree to which relationship breakdown between young people and their family, friends and partners is felt to be a common cause of homelessness. Relationship breakdown is often intertwined with other causes, especially financial difficulties, substance misuse and mental health problems.

**Fig. 8: Average percentages of young people experiencing different causes of homelessness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Homelessness Organisation Clients (n=5,696)</th>
<th>Young People Presenting as Homeless (n=1,068)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66% Relationship breakdown</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18% Drug or alcohol problems</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% Mental or physical health problems</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14% ASB or crime</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12% Housing was overcrowded</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Eviction or threat of eviction</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8% Abuse or domestic violence</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6% Rent or mortgage arrears</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6% Financial problems caused by benefits reduction</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% End of tenancy</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How causes of homelessness have changed**

With a changing economic and public policy environment in England it is likely that over time there will be changes in the causes of young people becoming homeless.

The extent to which homelessness organisations felt that different causes had changed since November 2011 is shown in Figure 9 below. The three causes that were identified as the most common (in the chart above) amongst young people, were also those with the most reports of increase by the homelessness organisations. Abuse or domestic violence, though experienced as a cause of homelessness by only 6% of clients on average, was felt to have increased since November last year by more than 1 in 4 organisations (29%).

The extent to which the local authorities felt that different causes of homelessness had changed since October 2011 is shown in Figure 10 below. Like the homelessness organisations, a significant percentage of the local authorities (39%) reported that relationship breakdown had increased as a cause. Similarly, abuse or domestic violence was felt to have increased by a significant minority (31%) of local authorities, despite only being experienced by 8% of the young people presenting to them as homeless. Overall, higher percentages of the
local authorities than the homelessness organisations reported no change, although eviction or threat of eviction, relationship breakdown, and abuse or domestic violence were the exceptions to this trend.

**Fig. 9: Percentages of homelessness organisations reporting changes to different causes of homelessness since November 2011 (n=83)**
PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS

The main focus of local authorities’ prevention work is on supporting people presenting as homeless or threatened by homelessness to avoid needing to make a formal application for assistance. There is a strong case for keeping young people at home, or in wider family networks, when it is safe to do so.22 This includes the potential for local authorities to make savings by investing in prevention services.23

Only a small number of the local authorities taking part in our research were able to provide figures on prevention. Those that did were able to prevent homelessness in two fifths of presentations (41%) by 16-17 year olds24 and almost half of presentations (46%) by 18-24 year olds.25

What the local authorities said had worked best to prevent homelessness since October 2011 was mediation between young people and their families26, providing access to supported accommodation of various kinds, providing a rent deposit scheme, paying Local Housing Allowance directly to landlords, and joint working between Housing Options teams and Children’s Services in the form of joint assessments and joint panels to decide on referrals to supported accommodation.

22 Developing positive accommodation and support pathways to adulthood, http://www.stbasils.org.uk/aboutus#resources
24 Responses from 34 local authorities.
25 Responses from 43 local authorities.
26 Mediation was available as a prevention tool in 71% of local authorities, a similar figure to last year.
The outcomes of prevention can be varied, but it is important that the focus for prevention is on the needs of young people, and not gatekeeping and rationing access to accommodation by local authorities with limited resources. The chart below presents the average percentages of prevention cases that result in different outcomes. In our 2011 report the most common outcome in prevention cases were young people returning to the family home. This year it is young people moving into supported accommodation; often a necessary move where a young person requires support and cannot return home.

**Fig. 11: Percentages of prevention cases since October 2011 resulting in different outcomes**

Joint working to support homeless 16-17 year olds

In our 2011 report we found that almost a fifth of local authorities (17% of 93) felt that joint working between Housing Options teams and Children's Services was ineffective or very ineffective. This year almost the same percentage of local authorities (18% of 90) expressed dissatisfaction with their joint arrangements.

Following the landmark G v LB Southwark judgment in 2009, all 16-17 year olds presenting as homeless to a local authority are owed a primary duty under the Children Act 1989. This means that when a young person of this age presents as homeless to a housing options team they should be provided with temporary accommodation under housing legislation and must be referred to Children’s Services for assessment under the Children Act 1989. If they present to Children’s Services first, they should be provided with accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act. To ensure that homeless 16-17 year olds do not fall between these two services, local authorities are advised in statutory guidance to have a joint protocol which

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27 Responses from 61 local authorities.
sets out how each department will work together and conduct a joint assessment.\textsuperscript{28}

That almost a fifth of the local authorities who responded to this question find joint working ineffective, means that some local authorities are still not meeting the requirements of the judgment, a year on from our first report highlighting this issue.

The local authorities who reported that joint working was ineffective said that relationships between the two departments were poor and joint assessments were not happening. Positive decisions under section 20 (finding a young person to be a ‘child in need’) were deemed to be rare. It was felt that Children’s Services were under-resourced and reluctant to work with Housing Options teams, making joint protocols ineffective.

“Children’s Services have not engaged with Housing Services with regard to this and dispute the legislation.” (Local Authority (LA), North East)

“We have a protocol in place, but Children’s Services only pay lip service to it. In reality we find that housing services are still responsible for homeless 16/17 yr olds, providing accommodation and arranging the move-on. There are no joint assessments happening and none found to be ‘in need’ under…Children Act.” (LA, East of England)

Almost a third of the local authorities (31\%) reported that joint working was neither effective nor ineffective. Many of these local authorities expressed similar frustrations to the ineffective group.

“We are working well with the Homelessness Response Team set up by [Area Y] County Council but unfortunately our local Social Care Team often do not recognise Southwark or their responsibilities towards 16 & 17 year olds.” (LA, East of England)

“It is difficult for us to get [Children’s Services] to engage and look at other factors rather than it just being a housing need which is what they normally come back with!” (LA, South East)

“Still a lack of communication by Children’s Services…with regards to doing joint assessments and outcomes. Also, accommodation options offered to the young people by Children’s Services are limited and [they] often only offer foster care.” (LA, South West)

Just over half of the local authorities (52\%) reported that their joint working was effective or very effective, because regular meetings were held, dedicated youth homelessness staff were in post, and joint procedures were clear.

“We are all struggling to maintain a service which can produce results.” (HO, North West)

The homelessness sector provides vital support services to young people with a range of interdependent and sometimes complex support needs. As outlined in the introduction to this report, homelessness organisations are operating in a very challenging environment, and more often than not continuing to provide high quality support services to vulnerable people. However, there is a limit to how far resources can be stretched before an impact on the quality and availability of services is felt.

**Capacity constraints**
Most of the homelessness organisations taking part in the research (85) responded to a question about constraints on their capacity. More than half (55%) reported that they had been unable to assist young homeless people because of capacity constraints in the two months prior to their completion of the survey questionnaire (higher than our 2011 figure; 48%). In a few cases this included young people placed on a waiting list rather than referred elsewhere. Just under half of these organisations (47%) were able to provide a figure for the number of young people they were unable to help, 602 in total. The organisations were not asked what happened to these young people or if they were able to access services elsewhere, although where young people were placed on a waiting list it can be assumed that they were eventually able to access the service.

**Support provided by homelessness organisations**
Although often not able to support every young person referred to them, the homelessness organisations that responded to a question about the support they provide (82) reported that they had maintained (52%) or increased (30%) the availability of their services since November 2011. This was despite the reductions in funding that have taken place across the sector and may be explained by organisations striving to do more with the funding they have retained.

**Fig. 12: Change in support services available to young clients since November 2011, percentage of homelessness organisations (n=82)**

![Pie chart showing the percentage of homelessness organisations: Increased availability 52%, Decreased availability 30%, No change 16%, No response 2%]
A similar number of the organisations (79) responded to a question on the availability of external services they could refer to. Half (51%) reported that these had decreased in the same period. The organisations pointed to the closure of publicly funded youth services and to the raising of thresholds for referral to other specialist provision for young people, particularly mental health services.

“Harder to access mental health services, and drug and alcohol support has decreased.” (HO, London)

**Availability of youth services**

The homelessness organisations were asked a specific question about closures of youth services in their areas (whether publicly funded or not) since November 2011. A majority (84) answered and more than half (54%) said that there had been closures. A further 1 in 10 reported that closures had not yet happened but were threatened.

**Fig. 13: Percentage of homelessness organisations reporting the closure of youth services since November 2011 (n=84)**

![Pie chart showing the percentage of organisations reporting different outcomes for youth services closures.]

The homelessness organisations felt that where services had closed the result would be less support for young people who need advice and guidance to make good choices, and positive activities to ‘keep them off the streets’. The services that had closed were providers of education and training, advice, and support for youth groups. This is a finding that was also highlighted in our 2011 report and is concerning because these services are important. In particular young people need high quality advice and guidance to make a successful transition to adulthood and the ability of homelessness organisations to provide this is becoming more difficult as they are increasingly overstretched.

“We have tried to provide services ourselves, but [are] not equipped to fill [the] gap. Young people have less constructive ways to occupy their time.” (HO, London)

“In all the regions we work in, some services have been cut: Connexions, alcohol services, careers advice.” (HO, across England)

A large majority (74%) of the homelessness organisations did not feel there were adequate services in their areas for young people with high support needs; just 14% did. It was felt that there was insufficient accommodation for these young people and that many were being placed in supported housing that was
intended for people with low support needs.

“We are commissioned to work with young people classed as high support, but in previous years some...would have been supported in specialist services, with clear focus (e.g. mental health, drug use) rather than a generic service like ourselves. We find that ‘high’ support has actually increased in complexity as other specialist services have had to close.” (HO, London)

“Young people with higher support needs are being referred or placed in services which are for young people with medium to low support needs, as they do not have enough appropriate services.” (HO, across England)

It was also reported that it was difficult to access support for complex needs clients, especially in rural areas, or that services for this group had closed entirely. Several organisations expressed concern about their own capacity to adequately support young people referred to them with high support needs.

“We are in a rural area [and] there is a lack of information, transport, and services due to our location.” (HO, North East)

“The support needs of young people are increasing and referrals are often exhibiting multiple complex needs whilst our organisational resources and external services are experiencing reductions in capacity.” (HO, North West)

**YOUNG PEOPLE’S ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS**

Suitable accommodation is an essential part of the support package for young people with support needs, and an essential part of every young person’s transition to adulthood. However, to effectively support this transition accommodation needs to be flexible and allow for young people’s mobility, and our research suggests that this is often not the case.

**Availability of emergency accommodation**

Local authorities make use of emergency, temporary accommodation to house young people who present as homeless when they have been found to be statutory homeless and require an assessment of their support needs. They also commission homelessness organisations to provide temporary accommodation to both statutory and non-statutory homeless young people.

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29 Developing positive accommodation and support pathways to adulthood, [http://www.stbasils.org.uk/aboutus#resources](http://www.stbasils.org.uk/aboutus#resources)
As the chart above shows, half of the local authorities taking part in our research reported that a form of short stay accommodation was available in their areas. This category covered a wide range of accommodation types, including hostels, foyers, supported lodgings, private lets, nightstops and Bed and Breakfasts. This last type (Bed and Breakfasts) was deliberately left off the list of options for this question because safeguarding issues mean it is not suitable accommodation for vulnerable young people. Bed and Breakfast accommodation was, however, listed as an ‘other’ option by more than 1 in 10 local authorities (12%).

The percentages of local authorities saying that crash pad beds and nightstops were available are very similar to our 2011 report. The percentage for assessment centres (30%) is much higher than last year (12%), but this may be explained by a change in the wording of the question this year which allowed for more provision to be counted under this category.

**Use of Bed and Breakfasts**

Placing vulnerable young people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation used by older adults should raise concerns about whether safeguarding of those young people can remain effective. Almost two fifths (39%) of the local authorities taking part in our research said that they use Bed and Breakfasts as emergency accommodation, either regularly or occasionally (see the chart below), while a further 44% use them rarely.

“B&B [use] has increased because of a general increase in demand.” (LA, North West)

“Nightstop has developed well over the past year and has been essential for young people aged over 18 and under. However there are still a large number of young people being accommodated in B&B’s, which is often inappropriate.” (LA, South East)
Change in the availability of emergency accommodation
Most local authorities reported the different emergency accommodation available to them remained unchanged since October 2011. Only small percentages (15-17%) reported each of the accommodation types increased in this time period. Just over 1 in 10 (12%) said that the availability of Bed and Breakfasts had decreased, which may be explained by decisions not to use this accommodation for young people, for the reason already mentioned. In our 2011 report, a similar percentage (17%) said that the availability of Bed and Breakfasts had decreased.

“A reduced amount of young people are placed into B&B by the Council.” (LA, East Midlands)

“More emergency beds for rough sleepers available with No Second Night Out project.” (LA, South East)

“More crash pad hosts have been recruited. 4 short stay assessment beds have been created in local hostels. Had to use B&B in emergencies.” (LA, East of England)

Fig. 16: Percentage of local authorities reporting change in the availability of emergency accommodation since October 2011

Other short stay accommodation (n=69)  17% 72% 9%
B&B (n=83)  17% 12% 63% 8%
Assessment centre/short stay supported accommodation (n=77)  17% 3% 73% 8%
Nightstop (n=72)  15% 4% 69% 11%
Crash pad beds (n=79)  15% 8% 70% 8%
The homelessness organisations that answered our question about the availability of emergency accommodation reported more change than did the local authorities. Larger percentages felt that provision had decreased in their area since November 2011. This was as many as 1 in 4 organisations for Bed and Breakfasts and short stay supported accommodation (see the chart below).

Homelessness organisations pointed to constrained local authority budgets to explain reduced use of Bed and Breakfasts, as well as the existence of more suitable accommodation types. The reduced availability of other accommodation was explained by local authorities decommissioning providers in the homelessness sector as part of their broader attempts to reduce budgets.

“B&B is used less due to the availability of crash pad with support.” (HO, East of England)

“Due to the restrictions on local authority budgets they have reduced the use of B&B.” (HO, South West)

“A lot of emergency accommodation was decommissioned in [City Y].” (HO, East Midlands)

**Fig. 17: Percentage of homelessness organisations reporting change in the availability of emergency accommodation since November 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation Type</th>
<th>Increased</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other short stay accommodation (n=80)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed and Breakfast (n=75)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment centre/short stay supported accommodation (n=82)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightstop (n=80)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crash pad beds (n=82)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Availability of longer term accommodation

Whether young people who become homeless are found to be statutory or non-statutory homeless, they should spend only a short period of time in emergency accommodation before moving on to longer term, more settled housing. Depending on the nature of their support needs, at this stage young people may be referred to supported housing provided by homelessness organisations, be allocated social housing, or supported to access the private rented sector.

**Supported housing**

Young homeless people with medium to high support needs, and those aged 16-17, should move from emergency accommodation to specialist supported housing. Most local authorities taking part in our research said that there was one or another type of supported housing available in their areas in September 2012 (see
the chart below). The type most reported to be available was hostels or foyers (77%). Few local authorities reported that shared accommodation specifically for young people closer to independence (those in employment, training or formal education) existed in their areas.

In most cases, the accommodation available was not felt to have changed since October 2011. The largest reporting of decreases in availability, 8% of local authorities, was for hostels and foyers. More than twice this percentage (20%) said that supported lodgings had increased in this time period. Both local authorities and homelessness organisations voiced concern that supported housing for young people with complex needs was being reduced and becoming harder to access.

“Cuts to Supporting People funded projects have meant that they have had to be more selective on whom they admit and they are therefore turning down applications for being ‘too high risk’. If our young people are too high risk for supported accommodation, what are their options?” (HO, North East)

However, this was not the only perspective on supported housing. In other areas the services that existed had become focused on young people with higher needs.

“Supported accommodation is more for clients who are extremely chaotic with multiple needs; it is no longer available as a stepping stone to independent living.” (LA, South East)

**Fig. 18: Percentages of local authorities reporting the availability of supported housing in September 2012**

30 The number of local authorities responding to our question varied for each of the supported housing types. The lowest baseline was 80 local authorities.
Accessing the private rented sector
The negative impact that changes to housing benefit (Local Housing Allowance) are having on young people’s ability to access the private rented sector is outlined below. These changes are likely to increase demand for a shrunken pool of private rented housing, which will be harder and harder to access as the changes to housing benefit come into force.

We believe that in this environment many vulnerable young people will lose out and may suffer set backs, just as they have worked hard to move forwards in life. To avoid repeat homelessness amongst young people, local authorities will need to be proactive about sourcing suitable accommodation that young people can afford, whether private rented or social housing. Where this is private rented accommodation, local authorities will need to find ways to overcome some landlords’ reluctance to let to young people claiming housing benefit.

The chart below shows the extent to which the local authorities taking part in our research have developed a range of schemes to ensure that young people can access the private rented sector. Most are able to help young people overcome the barrier of having to raise a deposit and have landlords in their areas willing to take young people as tenants. However, with less than 1 in 3 local authorities developing shared accommodation options for young people or a social lettings agency, it is likely that competition and scarcity will make access to private rented housing very difficult for young people (a point that has been made strongly elsewhere31).

“Move-on options are extremely constrained for any young single people and given the small size of the private rented sector and healthy demand from other parts of the market plus the lack of direct access and supported accommodation options in the Borough there is often difficulty in finding anything suitable for this group of people. At its most extreme there is concern that rough sleeping will increase as a result of this.” (LA, West Midlands)

Fig. 19: Percentages of local authorities reporting the availability of private rented schemes (n=90)

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This picture has changed since our 2011 report, when lower percentages of local authorities said that each of these four schemes was available.

The homelessness organisations taking part in our research reported that in general, move on accommodation for their clients had become less available since 2011 (see chart below). It was felt that accommodation in the private rented sector was limited in supply, in part because landlords were not willing to let to young people in receipt of housing benefit and because welfare reform (explained below) had made more properties unaffordable.

“It is only private rented accommodation for most young people but realistically it is extremely hard for any of our young people to access this as competition is so high, rents have gone up hugely and landlords won’t take young people on benefits.” (HO, London)

Fig. 20: Percentage of homelessness organisations reporting the availability of move on accommodation changed since November 2011 (n=84)

The impact of changes to Local Housing Allowance
A number of changes have been made to Local Housing Allowance (housing benefit for private rented housing) since the election of the Coalition Government in 2010. We have been concerned that these changes will negatively affect young people’s ability to access suitable housing in the private rented sector. Our research shows that two key recent changes are having negative consequences for young people (even before other welfare reform changes, such as increased direct payment of rent to individuals rather than landlords, and the overall benefit cap, take effect).

One of the changes is the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate of LHA (SAR) to all single claimants aged under 35 years old\(^32\). The SAR is a lower rate of LHA, based on the amount of rent a person would pay to share a property. The SAR previously only applied to people aged under 25. The other change is the capping of LHA at the cheapest 30% of local rents, limiting the range of properties that claimants can afford to rent. LHA was previously paid at up to 50% of local rents.

Local authorities' views
A majority (65%) of the local authorities taking part in our research said that the extension of the SAR was having an impact on the ability of young people to access private rented accommodation. Just 14% said that it was having no impact. Almost half (47%) of local authorities reported that the capping of LHA was having an impact.

The local authorities reported that shared accommodation was scarce, creating competition amongst young claimants for affordable housing and increasing the difficulty young people faced in finding somewhere suitable to live.

“We have an extremely limited supply (almost non-existent) of shared accommodation in the Borough which means that there are very limited options for young single people with no other support needs/vulnerabilities.” (LA, West Midlands)

Despite the increasing demand from prospective tenants, landlords were reported by local authorities not to want to let to young people, who were losing out to older prospective tenants judged to be more reliable by landlords.

“More competition for house shares and lodgings and many landlords would prefer to take on an older person who has probably maintained accommodation outside the family home before.” (LA, East of England)

Where shared accommodation was available in sufficient numbers, it was felt by many local authorities not to be affordable after the LHA changes, leaving young people with few options in the private rented sector.

“There is a scarcity of affordable options already, [and] this has been exacerbated by the extra applicants no longer able to access [the one bedroom] rate who now need shared accommodation. [Area X] has only 20% affordable properties under LHA therefore competition is fierce and many have to go outside the borough to find accommodation.” (LA, East Midlands)

The result of it becoming more difficult for young people to access private rented housing was reported to be an increase in youth homelessness and fewer options for prevention open to local authorities. Move on from supported accommodation for young people was also made more difficult.

“Welfare reform changes...will reduce social mobility and the ability of people to move to find employment and become independent citizens; these reforms will also further impoverish families, resulting in increased unemployment, homelessness, and potentially rough sleeping.” (LA, West Midlands)

“Our local young person’s advice services are reporting an increase in homeless 21-25s.” (LA, South East)

Homelessness organisations' views
The homelessness organisations taking part in our research were also asked about the impact of the changes to LHA. Of the 81 who responded, 1 in 4 felt there had been no impact, while more than half (55%) identified an impact from the extension of SAR and more than two fifths (43%) felt the capping of LHA had an effect.

The impact identified was very similar to that highlighted by the local authorities. It was felt that the changes had reduced their client’s ability to access the private rented sector because a lot of accommodation was now unaffordable, there was greater competition for scarce housing and landlords were unwilling to let to young
people paying their rent with housing benefit.

“This has led to greater competition for rooms available to rent, and a scarcity of landlords willing to lower rents to LHA rates. We have money available for young people to access the private rented sector to pay for first month’s rent, but it is mainly unused as young people struggle to find potential rooms to rent.”

(HO, London)

“Greater competition for poor accommodation; safeguarding concerns.” (HO, West Midlands)

Of real concern to homelessness organisations was the difficulty their clients experienced in finding suitable move on accommodation when they left supported housing.

“It seriously reduces the quality and quantity of the move-on accommodation available to our service.”

(HO, East of England)

**Accessing social housing**

Many of the homelessness organisations reported that their young clients could not easily access social housing. This accommodation type was felt to be completely unavailable in some areas, extremely limited in supply, or accessible only with a long waiting list.

“They are substantially fewer Housing Association/Council properties available for this age group.” (HO, East of England)

“There is a four year waiting list for social housing.” (HO, North West)

In some cases it was also felt that young people were not seen as a priority for social housing or that landlords avoided letting social properties to them.

“Options for under 25 year olds have changed as housing associations have started to see this age group as a problem…and are ring-fencing their own units for the over 25s.” (HO, North West)

Several local authorities responding to a question about their social housing allocation strategy seemed to confirm some of the views of homelessness organisations, because their strategies gave no preference to people because of their age.

“Young people are not prioritised [in our] allocation policy. Each applicant is assessed in the same way according to their housing need.” (LA, South East)

However, this was not true of all the local authorities taking part in our research. Some gave additional preference (on top of preference gained through other needs) to people aged under 25, or if they were specifically 16 or 17 years old. Others gave preference to young people leaving supported accommodation and/or young people leaving care. In many cases, preference in the allocation strategy was seen as part of the local authority’s work to prevent and reduce youth homelessness.

“Care leavers and young people leaving supported accommodation are given increased priority under the allocations policy and all homeless people are given a higher banding although given the overall demand for accommodation in the latter cases the wait for suitable social housing can be lengthy (up to 2 years).” (LA, West Midlands)
“Young people living in supported housing are initially placed in a band D (low priority) and upgrade to a B when the provider confirms in writing that the young person is ready to move into independent living.” (LA, North West)

There were also indications that local authorities are attempting to develop shared accommodation options for young people in social housing. In areas where social housing is available, this development may provide more young people with affordable housing options.

“We are working with our registered social landlords to explore using their larger units for conversion to HMO’s for move on.” (LA, London)
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has shown that youth homelessness is a growing problem. Alongside the increase identified in last year’s findings, this indicates a concerning trend. Unless we want a lost generation, this issue urgently needs to be addressed at both national and local levels. Prevention, accommodation and appropriate support must be available in order to prevent more young lives being damaged.

Prevention
This rise in youth homelessness is not inevitable, even in the current context of austerity and cuts. There are cost-effective services and responses that we know can prevent a young person ending up homeless and beginning what can be a downward spiral into further difficulties. If young people do not receive the help they need at this stage, they are far more likely to develop complex needs later in life and attract significantly greater costs than would be necessary to prevent an episode of homelessness.

It is important that young people at risk of homelessness receive the help they need at an early stage in order to prevent them from developing complex and entrenched needs that trap them in a life of homelessness. Homeless people are likely to have had a range of negative experiences in childhood and as a young adult. The evaluation of MEAM, a project that co-ordinated responses for adults with complex needs, found that the individuals involved had, on average, had their first contact with services between the ages of 15 and 23.33 As identified in Making Every Contact Count,34 a variety of universal agencies can – and should - all take responsibility for these young lives. Teachers, doctors, social workers and police can each play a part in preventing a young person’s journey deteriorating into homelessness.

Relationship breakdown remains the number one cause of youth homelessness. A significant number of homeless services and local authorities have indicated a rise in this, alongside a concerning increase in domestic abuse. A similar trend is observed in fewer young people returning to the family home as a result of prevention activities. These findings highlight that support for families is needed more than ever, both as early interventions and at the point of crisis. With financial pressure for many families increasing, and more benefit changes on the horizon, the right help for families when they need it has never been more important.

Accommodation options
It is well recognised that England is facing a housing crisis. Young people are particular victims of this situation, with their already limited accommodation options decreasing across the social, privately owned and private rented sectors. Social housing for many feels like an unattainable hope; with high demand, changing allocations policies which may not prioritise young people in need and limited options for the right property size for young people. With buying a property also a highly unlikely option, the private rented sector has for a long time been where young people have looked. As we had both predicted and feared, a consequence of certain changes to welfare benefits has been further restriction of access to the private rented sector.

Our research underlines that the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate and the Local Housing Allowance cap have resulted in additional competition for limited properties and more properties being financially out of the reach of young people. Alongside the financial limitations, young people are also

excluded through many landlords refusing to let to the younger age group, or not accepting LHA payments. This has left local authorities with fewer prevention options and also compounds problems for young people being able to move on from supported accommodation. We are facing a back-log of young people who are stuck in services, encouraging dependency and preventing them from gaining the independence for which they are ready.

The concerning finding regarding lukewarm and negative responses from Children’s Services department to supporting 16 and 17 year olds is indicative of continuing pressure across local authority departments. However, there cannot be any excuse for Children’s Services avoiding their duty under the Children Act 1989 to treat a young person without accommodation as a child in need.

This report has shown that some homeless services can no longer accept people because they are at full capacity and young people are being turned away. Through the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation by local authorities, young, vulnerable homeless people continue to be placed in potentially dangerous situations, without the support they need to get their lives back on track. The use of Bed and Breakfast to house young people is unacceptable, putting them at risk. This year the Ministerial Working Group added to existing statutory guidance by prioritising this issue, challenging local authorities to not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation. Our findings highlight the impetus that is necessary for local authorities to meet this challenge.

Support away from homelessness
Not only does a range of accommodation options need to be available to this group, they also need support with the full range of issues identified in this report. For example, the majority of young people who become homeless lack the practical skills needed to successfully make the transition to independent adult life. A significant number also have more complex needs such as mental health, substance misuse or offending. Indeed, the complexity and level of need of the young homeless people that the homeless sector serves is increasing.

Funding reductions are limiting the capacity of the homelessness sector to respond to these rising support demands. The impact of cuts in the voluntary sector has mostly been a reduction in staff, and those that remain now work with clients who have higher support needs. In addition, reductions in and closure of other services is also having an effect on the level of additional help homeless young people are able to access, for example from psychiatric teams. The result is young people’s needs not being met when they need it, with a negative impact on their overall life chances, stretching far beyond their immediate accommodation situation.
RECOMMENDATIONS AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

The Ministerial Working Group on Preventing and Tackling Homelessness (MWG) needs to take a lead across Government on responding to the findings of this report

- We welcome the inclusion of the Youth Accommodation Pathway in Making Every Contact Count\textsuperscript{35}. Targeted work on stalling the rise in youth homelessness and ensuring availability of adequate support and accommodation needs to be led by the MWG. The MWG should work with the Youth Action Group and the Troubled Families team to protect, promote and develop early intervention services that can prevent a young person becoming homeless. The MWG must ensure that youth homelessness is an integral part of the work across the other Government departments whilst continuing to lead on it as a focus of the MWG.

A strong focus, particularly by the Department for Education (DfE) and Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), is needed on supporting families to stay together where appropriate

- We welcome the Troubled Families initiative and the important work that is being carried out with the most chaotic families experiencing high levels of need. However, appropriate and timely support for a wider group of families is critical in preventing young people from leaving home in an unplanned way.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and DCLG need to adopt workable models to ensure that young people continue to be able to access the private rented sector (PRS)

- Last year we cautioned that people aged 18-25, as a result of the changes to benefits and the increased emphasis on the PRS as a solution for wider groups, would no longer be able to access it. Our research this year has witnessed this scenario being played out, resulting in a rise in youth homelessness. If we are to make the PRS work for young homeless people, given the current private rented market and benefits regime, the two interventions we consider to be both realistic and able to make a significant difference in challenging times are:

  1) Extending Temporary Accommodation (TA) subsidy (allowing for the TA subsidy regime to be expanded beyond LAs and Registered Providers to include not for profit organisations working in partnership with LAs to prevent homelessness for young people).

  2) PRS access/brokerage - To provide additional funding to extend programmes already funded by DCLG, such as Crisis’ PRS scheme, to promote and expand access to the PRS.

The DWP needs to carefully manage changes to the welfare system to ensure youth homelessness is not an unintended consequence

- Despite our request in last year’s report for the DWP and other government departments to ensure welfare policies have built-in safeguards which support families staying together, over the past year we have witnessed welfare changes pushing already difficult family situations into crisis. The report has shown that under-25s have been disproportionately affected by the changes. The DWP needs to recognise this and understand the impact that further cuts targeted at this group could incur.

We are particularly concerned about proposals being discussed within Government to remove housing

\textsuperscript{35} DCLG, 2012, \textit{Making every contact count},
benefit from under 25 year olds. If implemented this would result in increased youth homelessness as was the consequence of removing benefits from 16 and 17 year olds in the 1980s. We urge the Government to reconsider these proposals.

The DWP and DfE need to ensure that education, training and employment options are accessible to all young people, including those who are homeless

- It is important that young people who find themselves homeless are supported to keep or enter training, education and employment. Nationally there are limited opportunities in the jobs market for young people. Support should be tailored for those furthest from the labour market so they are not further penalised. There is a need to identify, address and remove obstacles to accessing employment, training and education for young people living in supported accommodation, such as curfew hours and travel limitations. The recently published success rates of the work programme highlight the need for schemes to be held accountable to delivering robust and sustainable options that offer real jobs for the long term in order to deliver positive routes out of homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS AT A LOCAL LEVEL

Services need to be in place to prevent homelessness:

Providers and local authorities need to work together to put responses in place to prevent young people from homelessness and widely promote these responses to non-housing professionals

- 2012 has welcomed the introduction of StreetLink, the national rough sleeper reporting website and hotline. Local services need to be in place to respond rapidly to reports of young people who are sleeping rough, and access points need to be widely promoted locally to people outside of the homeless sector to ensure awareness of the support available.
- Professionals from other services that come into contact with young people, for example teachers, GPs and Youth Offending Teams, should be trained to recognise those at risk of homelessness and know the steps that can be taken to prevent this happening.

Local Authority Housing and Children’s Services’ departments need to work together better

- The level of adherence to the duty on Children’s Services remains unacceptable. The need for Housing and Children’s Services departments to work jointly must be recognised and acted upon in the form of a Joint Protocol, including mutually agreed practices and with an agreed definition of what classifies as a ‘child in need’. Departments must then be resourced to provide support accordingly.
- Young people who have received support through Children’s Services can slip through the gap at the transition to adulthood. Effective communication and support pathways must be established in every local authority as a Care Leaver’s Housing Protocol.

Local authorities should protect funding for family mediation and other prevention services

- During hard economic times, it can be difficult to continue funding for essential preventative services. Yet these services can prove highly cost effective in the medium to long term and need to be maintained as homelessness can be avoided and longer term use of services diverted. It is important that the full range of statutory services, such as schools, raise awareness of the realities and risks of homelessness and refer young people at risk of homelessness earlier. Mediation, counselling and
family support services must also be available as early intervention. Research has shown that often waiting until a homeless application is made is too late. Local authorities should also protect funding for advice and prevention assistance, and for rent deposit schemes.

Accommodation and wider support services need to be in place to support people in the longer term:

Every local authority should integrate the youth homelessness Youth Accommodation Pathway steps 1 – 8 in their homelessness strategy

- Practical and strategic steps to implementing a Youth Accommodation Pathway for young people have been outlined in the Developing positive accommodation and support pathways to adulthood36 paper. Each local authority needs to have an integrated plan mapping individual pathways and actions in place to minimise youth homelessness. We recommend that local authorities use this document as a tool to developing local strategies to include prevention activity and a range of suitable, and affordable accommodation for all young people in housing need.

Commissioners, whilst operating in tight financial circumstances, must continue to commission based on quality as well as price

- We recognise that tough decisions are being made, but maintaining an adequate level of funding for well-designed and delivered young people’s homelessness services is essential to prevent a generation becoming trapped in a future of exclusion and homelessness. This should include consideration of different models, such as supported lodgings. A strategic review of the different routes for service users should be assessed to ensure that the needs of all young homeless people are addressed.
- Young people should be consulted at all stages of service design and commissioning.

Local authorities and providers need to work together to ensure young people are able to access a range of accommodation options, including improved access to the private rented sector and social housing

- As acknowledged above, steps are required at a national level to increase access to the private rented sector for young people. However, significant steps also need to be taken at a local level to ensure that range of accommodation options remain viable for under 25s. This should include the development of shared accommodation schemes with private landlords and brokering relationships with landlords to connect young people with appropriate accommodation.
- A local assessment of housing need and demand should include calculation of what is available to young people in different financial brackets and with different levels of need. This should then inform housing policy decisions. This may include converting derelict or empty buildings into housing spaces for young people. Local authorities should use the information available from Crisis to help develop solutions: where possible ensuring floating support is available to young people as well as ensuring housing benefit can be paid directly to landlords.37
- A proportion of social housing provision should be reserved for young people based on a local need assessment and this need should also be reflected in planning and development schemes. Incentives should be introduced for housing associations to develop shared tenancy schemes with existing stock,

36 Developing positive accommodation and support pathways to adulthood, http://www.stbasils.org.uk/aboutus#resources
37 Crisis, http://privaterentedsector.org/.
for example through utilising under occupied social housing to provide accommodation for young people.

Every local authority needs to provide access to suitable emergency accommodation for homeless young people

- Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not a suitable place for young people to be placed, even in an emergency. Local authorities must develop alternative solutions, such as nightstops, crash pads, and specific assessment beds in supported accommodation. Not only do these provide appropriate options for young people and more economic options for the local authority, but they can also provide a cooling off space when mediation is not immediately appropriate which may then facilitate a return home.

Mental health services need to form a central part of the local offer to young people

- The Implementation Framework for the *No health without mental health* strategy \(^{38}\) has provided a positive focus on the mental health of young people. This now needs to be adopted into a local integrated approach. Services need to ensure that they are accessible to homeless young people as well as the wider population, recognising the specific needs of this group in service design and commissioning. In particular, options for young people who are experiencing both substance misuse and mental health needs need to be available.
- There needs to be a focus on, and co-ordinated care, for homeless young people with complex needs to prevent problems escalating and becoming entrenched. Statutory agencies such as mental health, Youth Offending Teams, and drug and alcohol teams should have strong links with local homeless agencies. This should include agreed referral routes and other partnership working strategies to ensure that young people who are homeless and have more complex needs receive the support they require.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE NATIONAL YOUTH REFERENCE GROUP

Responding to youth homelessness
We recommend that:
- Homelessness organisations and councils carry out early intervention work in schools, informing young people under 16 about the reality of homelessness,
- The school curriculum should include homelessness issues and life skills including accessing benefits,
- Homelessness services need to be flexible, not 9 to 5 services, use different communication means such as Twitter and Facebook, and have a diverse staff team.

Prevention
We recommend that:
- Every area have mediation and counselling services, available as soon as an issue has arisen with a young person,
- Where mediation doesn’t work, efforts should be made to house young people with members of their family or friends, once risk assessments have been carried out,
- Young people and their parents receive information to understand what the reality of homelessness is, such as advertisements showing real life case studies of homelessness.

Partnership working
We recommend that:
- Homelessness organisations share information amongst themselves and support young people they aren’t able to help to access services elsewhere, increasing communication between organisations,
- Councils should ensure that there are supported lodgings schemes in place so that all young people who need housing with support can get it,
- Young people are signposted to the most relevant support service, and staff from the previous service should be able to explain the situation effectively to young people, and tell the young person’s story to the new support service rather than the young person having to relive it.

Responding to funding cuts
We recommend that:
- Young people are consulted when a decision is being taken on closing a service they use,
- Homelessness services cater for everyone so that all young people receive the services they need and are not pushed from pillar to post,
- If services for young people are closed there need to be alternatives in place, of the same or similar type.
Accessing suitable emergency accommodation
We recommend that:

- There are more supported lodgings and crash pad beds,
- Derelict buildings are converted into housing spaces for young people,
- Hostels provide spaces for young people sleeping rough, instead of them going into Bed and Breakfasts.

Accessing suitable long term accommodation
We recommend that:

- There are incentives for councils to promote shared accommodation in their areas to create options for young people,
- Councils coordinate communication and connection between young people needing accommodation and private sector landlords.
APPENDIX

Methodology
This report is based upon research carried out using an online survey. The survey link and a separate pdf version of the questionnaire was sent to more than 300 homelessness organisations in England listed on the Homeless UK directory. These organisations included day centres, emergency accommodation, direct access hostels and second stage accommodation, but not specialist accommodation such as mental health supported housing. A link to a similar survey questionnaire was sent to a named Housing Options contact in all 326 local authorities in England.

The questionnaire sent to homelessness organisations was developed with input from youth homelessness specialists; Centrepoint, St. Basil’s and DePaul UK. The questionnaire for local authorities was developed with input from the St. Basil’s youth homelessness advisor. Both questionnaires consisted of a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions, and were similar to the questionnaires used in the research for our 2011 Young & Homeless Report.

The questionnaires referred to two time frames: a recent calendar month (September 2012 for homelessness organisations and October 2012 for local authorities) for snapshot figures and since late 2011 (November for homelessness organisations; October for local authorities) to give an indication of change over time.

To avoid duplication respondents were asked to give their name, but all responses have been kept anonymous.

The research sample
117 homelessness organisations and 101 local authorities completed the survey, although not all questions were answered by all respondents.

The sample of homelessness organisations responding to the survey was broadly representative of the distribution of homelessness services across England, although only a small number of responses were received from organisations in the West Midlands, the North East, and Yorkshire and Humberside. The sample of local authorities was also broadly representative of the total, although only 4 London local authorities responded and there were similarly small numbers in the North East, and Yorkshire and Humberside.