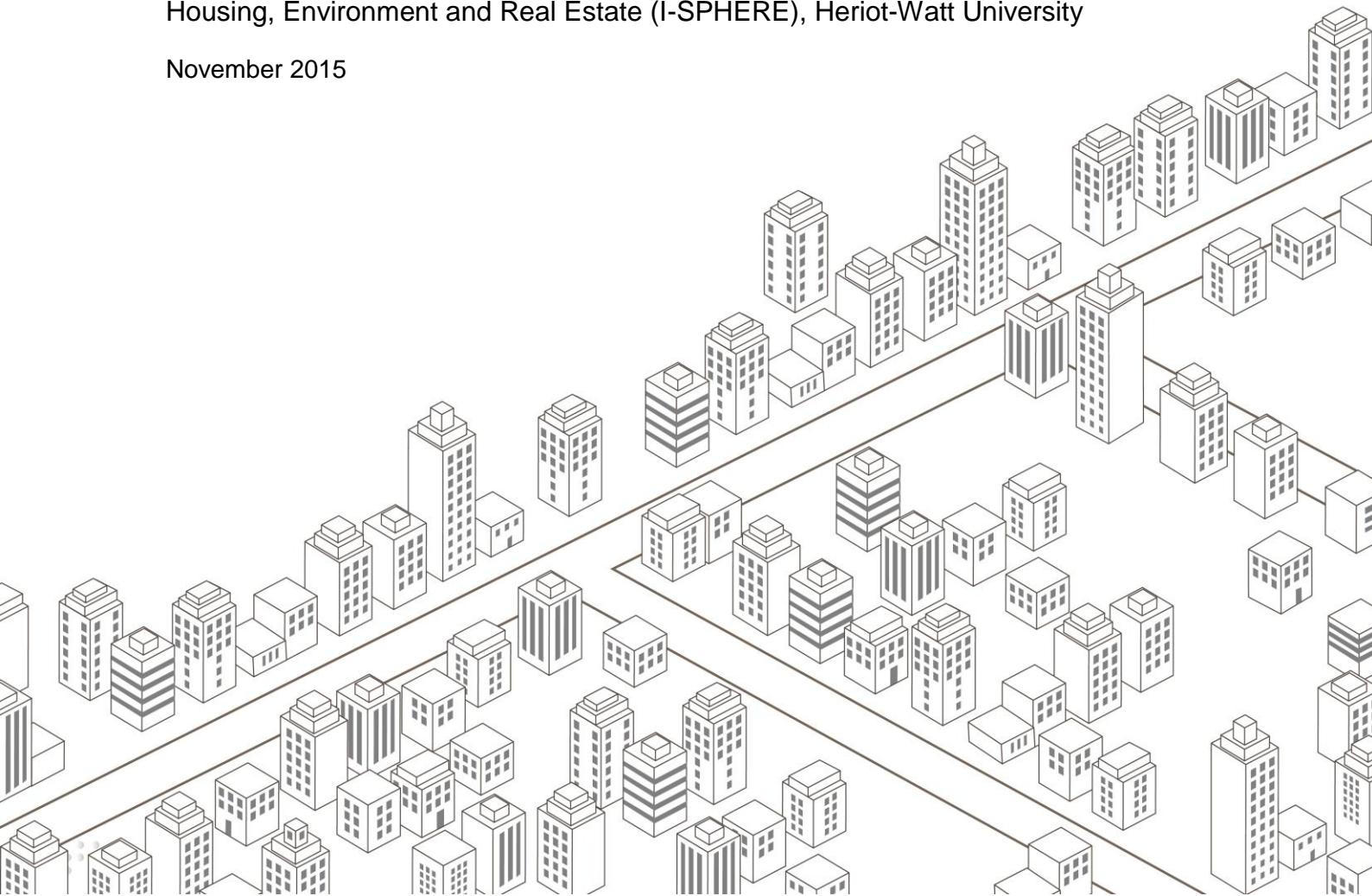


# Youth Homelessness in the UK:

## A Review for The OVO Foundation

**Beth Watts, Sarah Johnsen and Filip Sosenko.** Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Environment and Real Estate (I-SPHERE), Heriot-Watt University

November 2015





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Disclaimer: All views and any errors contained in this report are the responsibility of the authors. The views expressed should not be assumed to be those of The OVO Foundation or of any of the key informants who assisted with this work.

## About The OVO Foundation

The OVO Foundation is OVO Group's charitable arm. We support inspiring organisations with smart ideas to give young people a better future. Alongside energy and the environment, and education, The OVO Foundation focuses on youth poverty. The OVO Foundation plans to help address youth poverty by finding new and sustainable ways to improve young people's lives in the long term. As well as targeting the underlying causes of youth poverty, including youth homelessness, the Foundation works with partners and experts to support projects to help end this problem.

## About the authors

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## Acronyms

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ADHD   | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder                                |
| B&B    | Bed and Breakfast hotel   |
| BME    | Black and Minority Ethnic   |
| CAMHS  | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services                             |
| CEE    | Central and Eastern European  |
| CHAIN  | Combined Homelessness and Information Network                           |
| CORE   | COntinuous REcording of Lettings and Sales in Social Housing in England |
| DCLG   | Department for Communities and Local Government                         |
| DCSF   | Department for Children, Schools and Families                           |
| DHP    | Discretionary Housing Payment   |
| DSD    | Department for Social Development                                       |
| DWP    | Department for Work and Pensions  |
| EEA    | European Economic Area  |
| EMA    | Education Maintenance Allowance   |
| EMCDDA | European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction                 |
| EOC    | Equal Opportunities Committee (Scotland)                                |
| ESA    | Employment and Support Allowance  |
| GIRFEC | Getting It Right For Every Child  |
| HB     | Housing Benefit   |
| JSA    | Jobseekers' Allowance   |
| LGBT   | Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender                                    |
| LHA    | Local Housing Allowance   |
| NHS    | National Health Service   |
| NIHE   | Northern Ireland Housing Executive                                      |
| NPS    | New Psychoactive Substances   |
| NSNO   | No Second Night Out   |
| OECD   | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development                  |
| ONS    | Office for National Statistics  |
| PHE    | Public Health England   |
| PIE    | Psychologically Informed Environment                                    |
| PRS    | Private Rented Sector   |
| PSE    | Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey                                     |
| PSHE   | Personal, Social Health and Economic (PSHE) education                   |
| RSI    | Rough Sleepers Initiative   |
| SAR    | Shared Accommodation Rate   |
| SNAP   | Survey of Needs and Provision   |
| SP     | Supporting People   |
| SSAC   | Social Security Advisory Committee                                      |
| SSO    | Single Service Offer  |
| UC     | Universal Credit  |





## Executive Summary

### Introduction

This study reviews changes in youth homelessness policy and practice across the UK since 2008. It draws on academic research, 'grey literature', and available data and statistics, combined with qualitative interviews and focus groups with 26 youth homelessness experts from the four UK nations. The review aims to identify key gaps in provision and practical models that offer the most effective responses to youth homelessness.

### Youth homelessness policy in the UK

Young homeless people have different legal entitlements in each of the UK nations. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, only some 'priority' categories of young people are entitled to rehousing by their local authority, namely those with children, 16-17 year olds, 18-20 year old care leavers and those considered 'vulnerable' under homelessness legislation. The 2009 House of Lords ruling (the Southwark Judgement) has led to improved responses to homeless 16-17 year olds and more recent developments in case law may mean that a greater proportion of young people are considered 'vulnerable' and entitled to rehousing in the future.

In Scotland, 'priority' categories have been removed, meaning that virtually all young homeless people are now entitled to settled housing, a duty usually fulfilled through the offer of a social housing tenancy. In England and Wales, local authorities are now able to meet their rehousing duty using (less secure) private rented sector accommodation. Prevention-focused 'housing options' approaches are now well established in England, Wales and Scotland, though have not yet been introduced in Northern Ireland. Much praised new legislation requires Welsh local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for all eligible households, in addition to rehousing 'priority' groups for whom prevention fails.

The Coalition Government's period in office (2010-15) saw investment in a number of programmes focused on homelessness, with specific funding targeting homelessness among young people with the most complex needs (Fair Chance Fund) and to provide low-cost stable accommodation for young people seeking to work or study (Platform for Life). The needs of young homeless people have been the focus of particular attention in England through the development of the 'Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway' framework by youth homelessness charities in partnership with government/local authorities and in Scotland through a Scottish Parliament inquiry into youth homelessness prevention.

Restrictions to the welfare entitlements of young people – in particular the programme of welfare reform initiated by the Coalition Government and continued by the current majority-Conservative Government – have caused substantial concern. Those prompting greatest concern amongst stakeholders have included the introduction of Local Housing Allowance caps, the Shared Accommodation Rate, the intensification of benefit conditionality and the sharp rise in the use of sanctions, which disproportionately affect under 25 year old benefit claimants. It is feared that the removal of automatic Housing Benefit entitlement from 18-21 year olds from April 2017 will lead to an increase in youth homelessness. These welfare reforms are occurring within a broader context of budget cuts, which have led to a significant

reduction in generic youth service provision such as youth centres and youth worker outreach teams.

These policy developments have taken place in challenging wider macroeconomic and social policy contexts. Most notably, the fallout from the post-2007 recession continues to impact the labour market opportunities of young people. Youth unemployment is three times the unemployment rate for the working-age population as a whole, and young people in work are often on low pay and insecure contracts. Young people also face severe challenges within the housing market, including in being able to access and afford housing in the private and social rented sectors.

## **The scale of youth homelessness in the UK**

Calculating the scale of youth homelessness is challenging given the limitations of available data and its sometimes 'hidden' nature. There have been significant declines in levels of 'official' statutory youth homelessness (the number of young people owed the rehousing duty by local authorities) in England, Scotland and Wales since 2008/09. This is primarily attributed to the introduction of preventative 'housing options' approaches, though may also in England and Wales reflect the impact of the Southwark Judgement. There are concerns that the decline may also in part be the result of young people being dissuaded from applying as homeless (an unlawful practice known as 'gatekeeping').

Existing evidence suggests that declines in official 'statutory' homelessness may however have been offset by increases in other forms of homelessness. It was recently estimated that a total of 83,000 young people were in touch with homelessness services in the UK in 2013/14. This estimate combines statutory data on levels of 'official' homelessness and other data sources. In light of previous (though not directly comparable) estimates, this suggests that levels of youth homelessness are stable, and may even have increased, over the last decade. A 40% increase in the number of young people sleeping rough in London since 2011/12 has been a cause of grave concern.

Large-scale survey data on levels of overcrowding and rates of household formation suggests that hidden homelessness among young people may be increasing, particularly in London and the South East of England. According to a recent estimate, as many as one in five young people 'sofa-surfed' during 2013/14. Though for some young people sofa-surfing appears to be a short-term and safe experience enabling them to get back on their feet and avoid formal homelessness services, for others it involves a lack of privacy, insecurity, negative impacts on health and employment, and can place them at risk of financial, sexual and/or physical exploitation and abuse.

The overall number of young people experiencing homelessness appears to have remained stable, and may even have increased slightly over the last decade. In the context of substantial cuts to services and the post-2010 programme of welfare reform it is likely to reflect, at least in part, enhanced emphasis on proactive prevention during this period that levels of youth homelessness have not risen substantially.

## **Causes, profile and support needs**

Large-scale survey data indicates that young people are three times more likely to have experienced homelessness in the last five years than are older members of the general UK

population. The link between young age and homelessness appears to be explained by the disproportionate experience of poverty among young people, rather than their youth, per se.

Young people being asked to leave the family home continues to be the most common immediate trigger of youth homelessness in the UK. The financial pressure many families are experiencing as a result of welfare reform is therefore a growing concern. Young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and some Black and Minority Ethnic groups are more likely to experience homelessness than other young people. There is also concern about the housing needs of young migrants and older young people (i.e. those over 18 years old) given restrictions in the welfare entitlements of these groups.

There is clear evidence that a number of factors are associated with higher risk of homelessness, including: experiencing abuse or neglect as a child; experiencing domestic violence, mental health or substance issues within the family home; running away as a child; truanting or being excluded from school; leaving school with no qualifications; having learning disabilities; and being a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender young person. These 'red flags' offer organisations working with young people and their families indicators of risk to target support and prevent more severe problems developing.

Youth homelessness experts report that an increasing proportion of young people accessing services have 'complex needs', including mental health and behavioural issues, substance misuse, learning difficulties/disabilities, and/or offending. Some stakeholders see this increase as reflecting greater sensitisation to and diagnosis of support needs within the sector, the better prevention of homelessness among those with low support needs, and/or stricter targeting of services at those with higher and more complex needs. On the other hand, this increase is seen by some as the consequence of reduced youth service provision and difficulties accessing services that help young people address complex needs. Mental health issues among young homeless people, combined with limited access to and uptake of mental health services, present particularly acute challenges for the sector.

In line with a long-term decline in the proportion of young people using illicit substances, Class A substance misuse is now reported to be less of a concern for those working in the youth homelessness sector than in the past. The sharp increase in young people's use of New Psychoactive Substances, however, is a major challenge for some providers. These 'legal highs' are reportedly easy to access, low cost, and are associated with negative psychological and behavioural impacts that are particularly problematic in hostel-type accommodation. Use of 'legal highs' is considered to play a role in both causing and delaying the resolution of homelessness for young people.

## **Service provision for young homeless people**

A range of initiatives have been developed to address the needs of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, spanning preventative interventions (both universal and targeted), accommodation options for young people requiring varying levels of support, and approaches seeking to enable young homeless people to access employment and build their social networks. Although evidence regarding the effectiveness of some initiatives remains weak, this study highlights a range of approaches and interventions that appear to offer particular promise in strengthening youth homelessness provision in the current context.

## Prevention

Despite the mainstreaming of preventative ‘housing options’ approaches across Great Britain, more could be done to effectively identify young people at risk of homelessness and intervene early to prevent further problems developing:

- Clear evidence regarding the groups of young people most likely to experience homelessness should be better utilised to ensure that those working with children, young people and their families are able to target efforts to prevent homelessness. This might be fostered via joint working with educational establishments, health services, youth services, Job Centres and the police.
- The provision of specialist mediation services and whole-family support for young people and their parents/carers should be improved and wherever possible provided before relationship problems reach crisis point. Efforts should additionally be made to improve the uptake of such services where they are already offered.
- Provision of good quality and safe emergency accommodation that offers flexible respite and ‘time out’ to struggling families, including non-institutional forms of emergency accommodation such as Nightstop, is particularly important.

## Accommodation options

In the current context, youth homelessness organisations face a major challenge in providing good quality accommodation that is genuinely affordable to young people both in work (often on low wages) and out of work (often with limited entitlements to welfare support):

- There is a particular gap in accommodation provision for young homeless people with complex needs who require high levels of support. Approaches seen to offer promising solutions for this group include: high quality, small-scale supported accommodation projects; Supported Lodgings, which offer a room in a private home with trained hosts and support from professionals; and the ‘Housing First’ model in which homeless people move directly into ‘normal’ (scatter-site) housing on permanent tenancies and are provided with intensive, flexible and non-time limited support.
- Psychologically informed environments – consciously designed to take into account the psychological and emotional needs of service users – are now seen as crucial in the youth homelessness sector given that a higher proportion of young people using services have complex needs, including mental health and behavioural problems.
- For young people with low support needs, the development of long-term accommodation options that are affordable for individuals on a low income are required. Such provision might include: ‘light touch’ supported accommodation; Peer Landlord and other shared accommodation models; design and build options that minimise costs and rent-levels; repurposing of former student accommodation; and refurbishment of empty properties.

## Employment

The alignment and integration of youth homelessness and employment-focused services is seen to be increasingly critical. Means of improving the employment offer and future prospects of young people who have experienced homelessness include: improving (formerly) homeless young people’s employability and work readiness through training and skills programmes and work experience; engaging and supporting employers to enable them to offer employment opportunities to young people who have experienced homelessness;

and encouraging employment and earnings progression for homeless/formerly homeless young people through in-work support.

### **Social networks**

Supporting young people who have experienced homelessness to develop positive social networks is seen as an important means to support resettlement, improve young people's wellbeing, and reduce the risk of repeat homelessness. Developing 'social networks approaches' to youth homelessness provision that help young people develop informal connections in the local community both during and after homelessness, including through mentoring schemes, were seen as important areas for development.

### **Conclusions**

There have been a number of recent positive policy developments relevant to youth homelessness in the UK, including the roll out of preventative 'housing options' approaches in England, Wales and Scotland, extended obligations to looked after children and improved protocols regarding responses to 16/17 year olds. The evolution of distinct approaches in the four UK nations will generate insights into the most effective policies in preventing and tackling youth homelessness in the coming years.

These developments have taken place in extremely challenging wider macroeconomic and social policy contexts: the post-2007 recession continues to impact the labour market and opportunities of young people, who also face substantial challenges accessing affordable accommodation in the current housing market. The UK-wide programme of welfare reform and austerity measures initiated in 2010 has significantly weakened the welfare safety net and support services available to young people.

Data on the scale of and trends in youth homelessness indicates that despite concerted efforts to better prevent youth homelessness and dramatic falls in the number of young people accepted as 'officially' homeless by local authorities, overall levels remain stable and may even have increased slightly. It is feared that planned future cuts in the welfare and housing entitlements of young people will put more young people at risk of homelessness in the coming years.

The profile of young people accessing homelessness services appears to be shifting, with a higher proportion reported to have complex needs, including mental health problems, than in the past. Use of 'legal highs' is reportedly now a very significant problem for some providers. These shifts represent a challenge for service providers at a time of substantial financial pressure.

Evidence regarding the effectiveness of the interventions highlighted in this review is in some cases weak, with particular gaps concerning: the effectiveness of different approaches to family mediation, lighter-touch conciliation work and whole-family/parenting support in preventing youth homelessness; the pros and cons of different models of congregate accommodation compared to 'community hosting' models; and the impacts of various initiatives on formerly homeless young peoples' long-term housing experiences and financial and psychological wellbeing.



# 1. Introduction

## Background

In 2008, a review of youth homelessness in the UK concluded that “significant improvements to policies, services and monitoring” had been achieved over the prior decade and that policies tackling youth homelessness were “moving in the right direction” (Quilgars et al, 2008, p117). The main components of this “sea change” (Quilgars et al, 2008, p60) were an expansion of the statutory safety-net to give automatic priority need status to 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers aged 18 to 21, and moves towards a strong focus on young people within efforts to prevent homelessness more effectively (Fitzpatrick et al, 2011).

Seven years on, following the post-2007 economic downturn and five years of welfare reform, this study reviews current youth homelessness policy and practice across the UK, seeking to identify key gaps in provision and practical interventions and models that offer the most effective responses to youth homelessness.

## The current context

Concerns about youth homelessness are rising in a context where younger people’s wider opportunities appear to be increasingly constrained. Evidence is growing that young people bear a disproportionate burden of not only homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013; Clapham et al, 2012, Homeless Link, 2014d) but also of poverty (Padley and Hirsch, 2014; Stephens et al, 2014). Poverty rates<sup>1</sup> for 16-19 and 20-24 year olds stood at 34 and 29% respectively in 2012/13, reflecting a 6% increase since 2002/03 and representing bigger increases than for any other age group (Aldridge, 2015a; MacInnes et al, 2014). By way of comparison, the poverty rate for over 65s halved over the same period (MacInnes et al, 2014). Those tracking trends income and living standards have highlighted a “dramatic deterioration in young people’s fortunes” associated with their position in the labour market, housing market and welfare system (Padley & Hirsch, 2014, p3).

The youth unemployment rate doubled between 2004 and late 2011, peaking at 18% in 2011 (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c) and currently standing at 16%. Almost a quarter of unemployed 16-24 year olds having been out of work for more than one year (ONS, 2015b) and 13% of young people (almost 1 million) are not in education, employment or training (ONS, 2015c). Though there has been a recent decline in youth unemployment, levels remain well above the pre-credit crunch years, and almost three times higher than the unemployment rate for all working age people (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c; ONS, 2015b).

Further to this, there is concern that the employment gained by young people is typically insecure, poorly paid and offers few opportunities for progression or skills-development (Melrose, 2012), reflecting that growth in employment in the UK since 2007 has been concentrated in ‘non-standard’ jobs (i.e. part time, temporary or self-employed work) (OECD, 2015). Particular concern has surrounded the increasing use of ‘zero-hours’ contracts in the recruitment of young people (Pennycook et al, 2013; Acas, 2014; Pickvance, 2014), with

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<sup>1</sup> Measured as the proportion of households with an income after tax and housing costs of below 60% of the average (median) household income for that year.



government figures indicating that one third of people on such contracts are aged 16-24 (ONS, 2015a, see also Pyper and Dar, 2015).

Within the housing market, young people not only face constrained access to home ownership (Clapham et al, 2012), but also a shrinking social housing sector (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). Overcrowding in London and the South of England indicates the difficulty young people face accessing affordable accommodation in these areas in particular (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). Young people are now more likely to remain living with their parents than in the past (ONS, 2014) – especially those facing economic insecurity (unemployment or insecure employment) (Stone et al, 2011). At the same time, young people living outside of the parental home are increasingly reliant on family support to offset the costs of living independently (Heath and Calvert, 2013). These trends raise acute concerns regarding those unable to rely on family support.

Young people are more likely to share accommodation than in the past (Stone et al, 2011) and now increasingly rely on the private rented sector (PRS) to find accommodation (Aldridge 2015b). Within the PRS they face high and increasing rent levels (Homeless Link, 2013a; Stephens et al, 2014); are at greater risk of ‘deep poverty’<sup>2</sup> than those living in other tenures (Padley and Hirsch, 2014); and have less tenure security than home owners and social renters, with the ending of private rented tenancies now the primary immediate cause of statutory homelessness in England (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). Increases in rough sleeping among under 25 year olds in London (Centrepont, 2015a; CHAIN, 2015) reflect the very sharpest end of these trends in the housing circumstances of young people.

Within the welfare system too, young people appear to be fairing worse than other age groups. Since the late 1990s, under 25 year olds have been entitled to lower rates of Housing Benefit (HB) than older age groups. Recent cuts to HB rates introduced as part of the 2010-15 Coalition Government’s welfare reform programme have further eroded their entitlements. There is increasing consensus that younger people are being disproportionately impacted by welfare reforms in general (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013; Johnsen and Watts, 2014; Homeless Link, 2014d; Smith, 2015). This age group, for instance, are at far greater risk of having their benefits sanctioned than older Jobseekers Allowance claimants (Watts et al, 2014; Beatty et al, 2015) and youth services are reporting having to signpost increasing numbers of their clients to food banks (YMCA, 2014). The erosion of young people’s welfare entitlements looks set to continue over the next five years following freezes in working-age benefits, and restrictions on access to housing and other benefits for under 21s announced in the Summer 2015 budget.

In a context where young people face challenges within the labour market and housing market and restrictions to their welfare entitlements, understanding how to prevent and respond to youth homelessness is particularly important.

## The review

This review was commissioned by The OVO Foundation and undertaken by I-SPHERE, Heriot-Watt University between February and August 2015. The overall aim of the review

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<sup>2</sup> Having less than half the income needed in order to reach an acceptable standard of living, as defined by JRF’s Minimum Income Standard.



was to provide an evidence base to inform The OVO Foundation's<sup>3</sup> support and/or development of projects that effectively prevent and/or alleviate youth homelessness.

Three specific objectives underpin this aim, these being:

- to profile the young homeless population;
- to examine the drivers of youth homelessness;
- to assess the effectiveness of current policy and practice models in preventing and alleviating youth homelessness;

The last UK-wide review of youth homelessness was conducted in 2008 (Quilgars et al, 2008). Whilst significant research has been conducted on youth homelessness since then, there has been no further attempt to develop an overall picture of the scale and nature of youth homelessness or policy and practice responses to youth homelessness across the four UK nations. This report takes the 2008 review as its starting point and assesses relevant developments and evidence since that time.

The review has involved two key elements:

1. A desk-based review of published evidence on the scale, nature and trends in youth homelessness across the UK since 2008 and service provision for young homeless people. This review involved assessment of both academic and policy/practice (i.e. 'grey') literature published since 2008. Most of the evidence reviewed relates specifically to the UK context, but international literature is drawn upon where relevant.
2. National key informant interviews and focus groups with a total of 26 experts on youth homelessness. The sample included policy-makers and practitioners from the voluntary sector (15) and statutory organisations (10) (including local authorities and central/devolved government departments) across the four UK nations. In selecting the sample of key informants the focus was on identifying those able to comment on national level trends, gaps in service provision and emerging best practice in terms of interventions<sup>4</sup>.

The review focuses on young homeless people aged 16-24 in each of the four UK nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). The primary focus is on single young people without dependent children, though where possible and relevant the review comments on the experiences of young couples and families experiencing homelessness.

The review adopts a broad definition of homelessness, focusing on the experiences of 16-24 who are:

- Sleeping rough

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.ovoenergy.com/foundation/>

<sup>4</sup> Particular trends and developments at local authority level are not commented on as these are likely to vary substantially; a detailed assessment of these is outwith the scope of this particular study.

- Statutorily homeless: certain categories of young people defined under homelessness legislation who are owed the ‘main homelessness duty’ by their local authority<sup>5</sup>.
- Non-statutorily homeless: single homeless young people who have not been found statutorily homeless, but who are living in hostels, shelters, temporary supported accommodation or who are considered homeless by voluntary service providers<sup>6</sup>.
- ‘Hidden homeless’: young people who may be considered homeless but whose situation is not ‘visible’ either on the streets or in official statistics. Examples would include households living in severely overcrowded conditions, squatters, people ‘sofa-surfing’ around friends’ or relatives’ houses, and those involuntarily sharing with other households on a long-term basis.

## Report outline

Chapter two provides an overview of recent policy developments affecting young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness across the four UK nations. Chapter three reviews available data and research on the scale of – and trends in – youth homelessness. Chapter four considers the causes of youth homelessness, as well as the profile and support needs of young homeless people, and examines how this profile has changed in recent years. Finally, chapter five identifies key gaps in youth homelessness provision across the UK and the models and approaches pursued by Central Government, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations that appear to have most to offer in preventing and alleviating youth homelessness.

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<sup>5</sup> In Scotland, this includes *all* unintentionally homeless young people. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the ‘main homelessness duty’ extends to certain categories of unintentionally homeless young people deemed to be in ‘priority need’. Details regarding priority need categories in each UK jurisdiction are outlined in chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> The exact boundaries of this category are necessarily ambiguous given the different criteria voluntary sector agencies use in defining young people as ‘homeless’ and long standing evidence that local authorities interpret the homelessness legislation differently in deciding who is and is not statutorily homeless.

## 2. Youth homelessness policy in the UK

This chapter will provide an overview of the policy developments since 2008 that affect young people experiencing or vulnerable to homelessness, with a particular focus on the evolving statutory homelessness system in each of the four UK nations; support for non-statutorily homeless young people; and welfare policies which have been substantially reformed since 2010.

### The statutory homelessness system

Certain categories of homeless people in the UK have a statutory entitlement to rehousing by their local authority. As the legislation was first formulated, this included households deemed to be a 'priority', namely those including dependent children, a pregnant woman and or someone deemed 'vulnerable' and therefore less able to fend for themselves than other homeless people (because of mental illness or physical disability, for example). Those in 'priority need' and owed the 'main homelessness duty' under this legislation are legally entitled to rehousing.

This safety net has tended to be seen as partial and incomplete, due to its exclusion of single people not deemed to be in 'priority need' as well as those deemed to be 'ineligible' (i.e. some groups of migrants) and those deemed to be 'intentionally' homeless<sup>7</sup> (e.g. Mullins and Niner, 1998; Jones and Pleace, 2010). The legal entitlements that the statutory framework gives unintentionally homeless people in priority need are nevertheless generous by international standards (Fitzpatrick et al, 2014a).

The devolution of housing-related powers has led to substantial policy reform – initially in Scotland, and more recently in Wales – meaning that there are now substantial variations in the groups who benefit from this entitlement to rehousing and the nature of the entitlement. As a consequence, young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness now face a different 'offer' in each of the four UK nations.

This section considers key developments in the following five areas: (1) who is classed as in 'priority need' (2) developments in case law (3) temporary accommodation (4) the introduction across much of the UK of a preventative 'housing options' approach and (5) the role of the private rented sector in the statutory homelessness system.

#### Priority need

Though certain subgroups of young people (young families and those assessed as specifically 'vulnerable') have been considered in 'priority need' since the inception of UK homelessness legislation in the 1970s, being at a young age in and of itself was not sufficient to gain priority status until the early 2000s (Quilgars et al, 2011). During this period, England, Wales and Scotland extended automatic priority status to all 16-17 year olds. In addition, 18-20 year old care leavers and care leavers aged over 21 and assessed as vulnerable as a result of being looked after as a child are also considered to be 'priority need' in England. Key informants in this study made a case for further extension of priority

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<sup>7</sup> In addition, where an applicant is found to eligible, in priority need and unintentionally homeless, but not to have a local connection, the duty can be transferred to another local authority with which they do have such a connection (except in cases where they are at risk of violence in that area).

need categories to care leavers up to the age of 25, to reflect and compliment the extension of local authority corporate parenting duties in some parts of the UK (see below). Concerns about the continuing poor experiences of care leavers prompted the publication of a Care Leavers Strategy in 2013 (HM Government, 2013) and in 2015 the National Audit Office undertook an investigation into “the support for and challenges facing care leavers, government policy and actions, and progress made in improving outcomes” (NAO, 2015). The Scottish Government released new Guidance aiming to improve housing outcomes for this group in 2013 (Scottish Government, 2013) and in Wales, a review analysing provision for young care leavers at risk of homelessness is currently underway<sup>8</sup>. Wales also introduced automatic priority status for prison leavers regardless of age in 2001, important in relation to homelessness given the identification of young offenders as a key ‘at risk’ group (this automatic priority has since been removed, see below). In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, young people at risk of financial or sexual exploitation were also brought within the statutory safety net by considering them to be in ‘priority need’<sup>9</sup>. Despite the inclusion of this latter group in the statutory safety net, Northern Ireland has fallen behind in terms of strengthening the safety net for young people, with neither 16 and 17 year olds nor children leaving care automatically granted priority need (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). That being said, improving responses to youth homelessness was a priority identified within the 2012-17 Northern Ireland Homelessness strategy and in 2010, a cross-sector Strategic Regional Reference Group was established to monitor good practice and local protocols, develop models of accommodation and support, and develop monitoring systems to inform future planning in this area (NIHE, 2012).

Young people have thus been one key group to benefit from amendments to the priority need categories, but by far the biggest change to ‘priority need’ legislation was introduced in Scotland in 2003 and benefited not just young people but all those groups previously deemed ‘non-priority’. Following recommendations made by the Homelessness Task Force – a team of voluntary sector, statutory sector and academic members set up directly following devolution to review responses to homelessness in Scotland – the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 committed Scottish local authorities to the gradual expansion and then abolition of the ‘priority need’ criterion. As a result, as of the end of 2012, virtually all homeless people in Scotland have been entitled to settled housing through their local authority (Fitzpatrick et al, 2012b). In 2013, Scotland further extended the statutory safety net by introducing a duty on local authorities to assess the housing support needs of statutorily homeless households and to ensure that housing support services are provided to those assessed as having support needs (Rosengard and Jackson, 2012).

### Case law and other legal developments

Further to these changes, two important case law developments have affected the implementation of statutory homelessness legislation. The first relates specifically to the treatment of 16/17 year olds who are homeless and followed ambiguity regarding where primary responsibility for this group lay within local authorities – children’s services or the local housing authority. In the ‘Southwark Judgment’<sup>10</sup> (May 2009), the House of Lords ruled that primary responsibility lay with children’s services (under the Children Act 1989) and in

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://ppiwi.org.uk/new-assignment-provision-for-young-care-leavers-at-risk-of-homelessness/>

<sup>9</sup> In Wales this focuses on 18-20 year olds. Northern Ireland and Scotland set no specific age limit.

<sup>10</sup> Which applies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

2010, Joint Statutory Guidance was published in England (and later in Wales and Northern Ireland) to clarify the appropriate response to 16/17 year olds approaching local authorities as homeless (DCSF and CLG, 2010). The guidance emphasised the need for co-ordination across relevant departments and further called for a child-centred approach to assessment, highlighting the importance of facilitating access to advocacy for young people.

Concerns remain about ineffective joint working and inadequate protocols in this area and of poor experiences of support among 16/17 year olds (Law Centres Network, 2013; North East Homeless Think Tank, 2014; Pona and Crellin, 2015), in particular among those denied or who refuse to accept 'looked after status' following a children's services assessment (Coram, 2015; Pona and Crellin, 2015). The Southwark Judgement does, however, appear to have had a positive impact. In Wales, the 'Southwark Judgement project' brought together key partners in each of the 22 local authorities to with the aim of ensuring that legal requirements were met and optimum outcomes achieved for homeless young people. An evaluation of the project identified improving practice but continuing inconsistency in responses to 16/17 year olds and an ongoing need for oversight of local authority practice in this area (Inkson, 2014). More broadly, key informants in this study identified positive shifts in the response to 16/17 year olds:

*"in terms of 16-17 year olds actually it seems to be that there's a dip... there is, particularly [for] 16-17 year olds in many local authorities better joint prevention work to try and support young people to start at home or plan a move"* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

*"the number of 16 and 17 year olds being found homeless is actually reducing.. [which is] potentially to do with social care stepping up and doing more and so therefore they're not necessarily going down the homelessness route."* (Local Government representative, Wales)

These perspectives are supported by (a) the decline in statutory homeless acceptances from vulnerable young people in England, from 8% of acceptances in 2008/09 to 2% in 2014/15 (see chapter 3) and (b) the increase the in number of children starting to be looked after (i.e. going into care) at 16/17 years old (Department for Education, 2015).

Also relevant here are extended local authority corporate parenting duties to looked after children. In England, guidance and regulations make clear the expectation that local authorities should stay in touch and support care leavers until they are 21 (or later if they are in education or training) (Department for Education, 2010), and 'Staying Put' arrangements have sought to enable young people to stay with their foster carers until 21 where this is in the young person's interests. There have recently been calls to extend these new obligations to all children in care (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014; Stevenson, 2015) and to reflect this progress through priority need categories within the statutory homelessness system (see above). In Northern Ireland, those living with foster carers and in education, employment or training have been able to remain with their foster carer up to the age of 21 since 2006 under the Going the Extra Mile scheme. From April 2016, fostered young people in Wales will be able to stay with their foster carers after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday under 'When I'm Ready' arrangements introduced in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Scotland has recently gone further in this area, introducing - via the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 – an entitlement for care leavers to remain

in care up until their 22nd birthday and receive ‘aftercare’ support until their 26th birthday. These provisions – described as the “biggest improvement in support for care leavers for a generation” (Barnardo’s in Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC), 2014, p22) aim to offer a smoother transition out of care and to enable positive relationships between young people and their carers to be maintained into adulthood (CELCIS, 2014). If effectively implemented these provisions should help ensure that no care leavers are forced to rely on the statutory homelessness system to find accommodation (EOC, 2014).

The 2014 Act also puts elements of the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) approach<sup>11</sup> on a legislative footing. This approach evolved in Scotland over the 2000s and offers a framework within which to support and achieve better outcomes for all children and young people. Key to the GIRFEC approach is the requirement for all children and young people (up to and in some cases beyond the age of 18) to have a ‘Named Person’ – that is a single point of contact in the health or education system who can ensure the provision of adequate support where needed and act as a point of contact for other professionals concerned with the wellbeing of a child or young person (Scottish Government, 2014). Some in the sector hope that this structure will in the future help facilitate better and earlier responses to young people’s housing needs (EOC, 2014).

Another development concerns the recent (May 2015) Supreme Court judgement on the so called ‘Pereira test’, used by local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to establish whether a household applying as homeless is ‘vulnerable’, and thus in ‘priority need’ and entitled to the main homelessness duty. In this landmark ruling, the court deemed that instead of comparing a homeless applicant to the ‘ordinary homeless person’ – a comparison that had evolved into a very narrow and strict test (Bates, 2015) - local authorities should instead apply the less strict test of whether the applicant is more vulnerable than an ‘ordinary person if made homeless’. This “very significant and potentially far reaching” (Peaker, 2015) ruling has been hailed as major step forward in improving responses to single homelessness (Bowcott, 2015) and youth homelessness<sup>12</sup>. The judgement is expected to bring a higher proportion of single young homeless people within the statutory safety net and may thus help reveal and assist some of the previously hidden youth homelessness population (St Basils, 2015). One key informant however advised caution in expectations regarding the impact of the judgement for young people:

*“I don’t think making vulnerable young people potentially priority need is going to be an answer in itself to some pretty complex issues... what is more likely to make a difference is good prevention and relief... and finding suitable options with support where needed for young people... we’re in a position in England where I think people maybe haven’t thought through the limitations of what difference priority need will make to vulnerable people. It won’t get them anything beyond a roof over their head.”*  
(Voluntary sector representative, England)

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/background>

<sup>12</sup> The ruling applies in England and Northern Ireland, but not in Scotland (where the priority need category has been abolished) or in Wales, where the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 defines the relevant comparator as the ‘ordinary homeless person who becomes street homeless’.



## Temporary accommodation

Applicants who are owed the 'main homelessness duty' are entitled to temporary accommodation if no immediate settled accommodation is available. There have been longstanding concerns about the use of Bed and Breakfast hotels (B&Bs) to accommodate young people in an emergency, given the lack of support, varying quality and safeguarding concerns associated with this option (Centrepont, 2005; Homeless Link, 2014d; Harleigh-Bell, 2014). Local authorities across the UK remain under pressure to reduce use of this kind of accommodation for all homeless people, with a particular focus on not accommodating families and 16/17 year olds in B&Bs<sup>13</sup>.

Unpublished statutory homelessness data in England suggests that in the three months to the end of June 2015, only 40 16/17 year olds were accommodated in B&B accommodation. The number of households (of all ages) in B&B accommodation, however, continues to grow in England, albeit that the rate of growth has slowed and B&B placements now account for only around 10% of temporary accommodation placements (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). Homeless Link's annual youth homelessness survey indicated that 34% of responding local authorities use B&Bs to accommodate young people occasionally, 18% do so often and only 6% never do so (Homeless Link, 2014d). Evidence also suggests that children's services continue to place 16/17 year olds into such accommodation (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014; Spurr, 2014b), though lack of official reporting of children's services emergency accommodation placements means it is hard to gauge the extent of this issue. One England based key informant commented:

*"Bed and breakfast use by children's services authorities... is going in the wrong direction..... I think part of it is lack of other options but part of it is that a lot of places that are using B&B regularly are still not joined up with Housing... they are commissioning in silos still"* (Voluntary sector representative, England).

In Scotland, which saw the number of households in temporary accommodation treble over the decade to 2011 albeit with some stabilisation more recently (Fitzpatrick et al, 2012b; Scottish Government, 2015a), 29% of temporary accommodation offers in 2013/14 were for B&B accommodation, rising to 43% of offers made to households without children, albeit that B&B placements tend to be for an initial and relatively short period (on average 41 days) (Shelter Scotland, 2015). A survey of organisations working with young homeless people indicates that B&Bs are commonly used to temporarily accommodate this group in Scotland (Harleigh-Bell, 2014), with statutory homelessness data indicating that the proportion of

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<sup>13</sup> In England, targets and guidance have been used to reduce B&B use, in particular for families and for 16 and 17 year olds. The 2013 'Gold Standard' initiative (a government funded local authority peer-led programme offering support, guidance and training to councils to improve their homelessness services) challenges participating authorities to not place *any* 16-17 year olds in B&B accommodation (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). A recent report from the House of Commons Education Committee (2014) recommends moving towards an outright ban on using B&B accommodation, proposing interim steps of improved reporting (in particular for Children's Services) and requiring local authorities to commission alternative emergency accommodation options (see also Pona and Crellin, 2015). Northern Ireland has a national target to use B&B accommodation only in emergencies (PSI Steering Group, 2009; NIHE, 2012). Wales has restricted the use of B& B accommodation to very short periods and specified minimum standards temporary accommodation must meet (Welsh Government, 2015), with the End Youth Homelessness Cymru partnership recently calling on the Welsh Government to entirely end the practice of placing 16/17 year olds in such accommodation (see <http://www.llamau.org.uk/news/i/814/>). Scotland requires local authorities to avoid placing families in unsuitable TA, with guidance from Shelter Scotland and CIH Scotland aiming to provide a benchmark for TA in terms of quality, location and management of properties being let to all homeless households (Shelter Scotland, 2015).

youth homelessness cases having to stay in B&B accommodation at some point has fallen marginally from around 15-16% in the period 2007/08-2011/12 to 13% in 2014/15 (Scottish Government, 2015c).

The unsuitability of B&B accommodation has been a long standing issue in relation to family and youth homelessness, but a different concern about the *location* of temporary accommodation placements has emerged more recently, as local authorities have increasingly placed homeless households in temporary accommodation out of the area in which they presented as homeless. Out of area placements increased by 26% in the year to September 2014 and mainly involve London Boroughs (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). What is not clear is the extent to which this trend affects young applicants. Indeed, the majority of controversy surrounding out of area placements has focused on homeless families (for example see Butler, 2014). This may reflect that younger priority need households are able to access hostel-type accommodation within their own borough/local authority area. It should also be noted that a 2015 legal challenge has somewhat curtailed local authorities' capacity to accommodate homeless people out of the area, by demanding that they provide evidence that suitable accommodation was not available locally (Douglas, 2015).

### Homelessness prevention and the 'Housing options' approach

Perhaps the key shift in responses to youth homelessness identified by Quilgars et al (2011), was a shift towards a 'housing options' approach to homelessness prevention in England and Wales. From 2002, local authorities in England were required to develop prevention-focused homelessness strategies. Following strong promotion by Central Government, this led to the mainstreaming of the 'housing options' approach, wherein those approaching their local authority with a housing issue are interviewed with a view to offering advice and assistance geared towards preventing the need to make a formal homelessness application (Fitzpatrick et al, 2011). This more informal, flexible and assertive problem solving approach was seen to provide a necessary counterweight to the more legalistic, rationing model of the formal statutory homelessness system. Most notably with regard to young people, this prevention work often includes family mediation services, reconciliation work and home visits that seek to improve family relationships and prevent the young person having to leave the family home. In addition to these 'targeted' individual preventative measures, partnership working with the local Troubled Families programme<sup>14</sup> and education work in schools is also now offered in the majority of local authorities (Homeless Link, 2014d).

In recent years, concerns around youth homelessness in England appear to have increasingly influenced local authority housing options services (St Basils, 2012), not least through the development (in 2012) and revision (in 2015) of the 'Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway' framework<sup>15</sup>. Developed in consultation with homelessness organisations, in dialogue with DCLG and local authorities and drawing on examples of good

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<sup>14</sup> The DCLG programme targets families who have children regularly truanting from school, have an adult on out of work benefits, cause high costs to the tax payer and/or involved in youth crime and anti-social behaviour and seeks to work with them to improve school attendance, reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour and get adults closer to work.

<sup>15</sup> St Basils and Barnardo's have since released a 'care leavers' accommodation and support framework' based on the Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway but also reflecting the specific legislation and rights affecting care leavers in England. See [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/Put-care-leavers-in-the-driving-seat-so-they-can-choose-their-housing/press\\_releases.htm?ref=108907](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/Put-care-leavers-in-the-driving-seat-so-they-can-choose-their-housing/press_releases.htm?ref=108907). St Basils is now planning to develop a version of the Pathway tailored to young people involved in the criminal justice system.



practice, data on youth homelessness and research evidence, the pathway emphasises early intervention and prevention (DCLG, 2012; St Basils, 2012 and 2015). The framework was developed in juxtaposition to a “deficit” approach to youth homelessness:

*“The “deficit” model is framed around imminent or actual homelessness being the trigger to getting a response to housing need from local authorities and other service providers. And too often there is a focus on the single issue of homelessness, missing the opportunity to look at the other needs a young person is likely to have. Sorting out housing alone will not, in itself, support the successful transition to adulthood for most young people who have to leave their family home at a young age.” (St Basils, 2012, p2)*

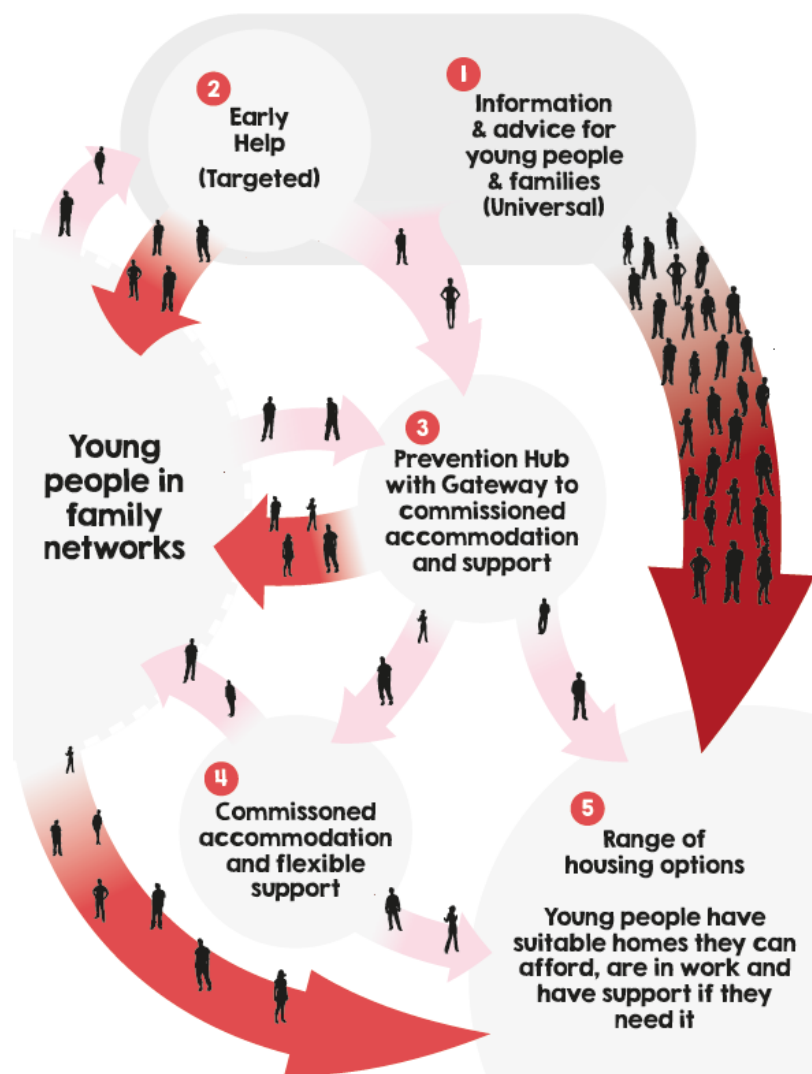
In contrast, the pathway model “is about supporting young people to be active, aspiring, confident young citizens, taking up opportunities to further their economic independence and wellbeing” (St Basils, 2012, p4). The revised pathway (see figure 1) comprises five stages:

1. Universal information and advice for all young people and their parents/carers;
2. Targeted early/pre-crisis intervention and prevention for young people at risk of homelessness or unable to meet their housing needs through their own resources and networks; and
3. An integrated service response providing young people who are homeless with planned access to;
4. Commissioned accommodation and flexible support for younger/vulnerable young people; or
5. A range of housing options for young people on low incomes.

To be realised effectively the pathway requires joint working between children’s services, housing authorities, housing providers and voluntary sector homelessness organisations. Where such an integrated pathway is in operation, it should facilitate young people to achieve positive outcomes not just in relation to their housing situation, but also in other aspects of their lives (health, positive relationships, safety, meaningful activity and positive contribution). Though the adoption of such a pathways approach has not been identified as explicit government policy, it was initially presented and endorsed in the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness’ first report (DCLG, 2012) and offers a practical tool local authorities can use to commission and structure youth homelessness services. Just short of half of local authorities and service providers participating in Homeless Link’s annual youth homelessness survey report a positive pathway model operating in their area (Homeless Link, 2014d). Despite this, and though highlighting that continuing development of “innovative, cost-effective solutions” (p4) across the sector, St Basils (2015) also note that there remains “an absence of coherent pro-active housing policy for this group [young people]” (p8). Rugg and Quilgars (2015) add that a coherent housing policy for young people generally remains elusive.

From 2004, the Welsh Government followed suit (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004) by promoting preventative approaches - albeit somewhat less strongly than in England – but has recently introduced substantial reforms to homelessness legislation that fundamentally

**Figure 1 The Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway**



### Positive Pathway Framework: The 5 Service Areas

#### 1 Information and advice for young people and families

**The Service:** Timely, accurate information and advice about housing options available to everyone, delivered in a range of ways including web-based information and through schools to reach young people, families and professionals.

**Desired result:** Young people and families are empowered to plan transitions to independent living without support from specialist services. They understand the links between housing choice and their financial and employment situation. They know where to get help if they need it.

#### 2 Early help

**The Service:** Early intervention targeted to reach households where young people are most likely to be at risk of homelessness, in addition to 1). Delivery involving all local services working with young people and families at risk, e.g. Troubled Families programme, Family Support, Youth Support and Youth Offending Services.

**Desired result:** Young people stay in the family network where possible and safe and are supported to make planned moves if they need to move out.

#### 3 Integrated response ('hub' or 'virtual hub') and gateway to commissioned accommodation and support

**The Service:** Led by the Housing Authority and Children's Services, an integrated service for young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or need help with planned transitions to independence. Housing options and homelessness prevention services come together, often co-located, with other services including support for pathways into learning and work. Underpinned by assessment and including a needs driven gateway into commissioned supported accommodation and flexible housing related support services. Key data collection point to inform ongoing development of the pathway.

**Desired results:**

- Homelessness is prevented wherever possible, for example by supporting young people to stay in their family network or preventing the loss of a tenancy.
- Young people who need accommodation and/or support get it, including quick access emergency accommodation and immediate and ongoing support where needed.
- Young people's accommodation and support underpins rather than disrupts their pathways in learning and work.

#### 4 Commissioned accommodation and support

**The service:** A range of accommodation and support options designed for younger and more vulnerable young people. Accommodation and support is linked together in some options, for example supported accommodation, Foyers, supported lodgings and Housing First. Flexible outreach support is also available to support young people wherever they live (including in the family home) and stick with them when they move if needed.

**Desired results:** Young people gain the stability and skills they need, engage with learning and work and move on to greater independence.

#### 5 Range of Housing Options

**The service:** A range of safe, decent, affordable housing options, shared and self-contained, in the private, social and third sectors. Where the market doesn't provide sufficiently for young people on low incomes the offer will need to be shaped through local housing strategies, using partnerships to create options. May include creative approaches such as partnerships with learning providers and employers to provide dedicated accommodation that underpins participation in learning and work. Access to flexible outreach support (4) in case young people need it.

**Desired results:** Young people are economically active and have suitable homes that they can afford - they can build for their future.

Source: St Basils, 2015, pp.6-7

alter the delivery of homelessness prevention services (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c and see below).

Scotland adopted a 'housing options' approach from 2010, somewhat later than England and Wales, and in the distinct context of its expanding legal safety net (Ipsos MORI and Mandy Littlewood Social Research and Consulting, 2012). There has been detailed consideration of how the expanded legal framework and housing options approach are working for young people in Scotland, first through the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group<sup>16</sup> and second through the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee's (EOC) inquiry into the prevention of homelessness amongst young people. Recommendations from the EOC's first report (Scottish Parliament, 2012) focused on the need for improving mediation, respite and life skills interventions and the Committee followed up the inquiry with calls for evidence on progress in this area in 2014, maintaining dialogue with key ministers into 2015<sup>17</sup>. Evidence submitted in 2014 highlighted a range of concerns including: the growing proportion of young people found to be intentionally homeless (and thus not entitled to the main homelessness duty); the increased length of time some young people are spending in temporary accommodation; issues accessing PRS accommodation; how care leavers fare under the statutory system and housing options approach; variation between local authorities in the implementation of preventative services; the inappropriate diversion of young people away from making a homelessness action and the concomitant under-recording of homelessness; the increasingly limited options faced by young people in the context of welfare reform (see below); low take up and examples of bad practice in mediation provision; and the continued use of unsuitable accommodation. This report prompted a dialogue with the Minister for Housing and Welfare and Minister for Children and Young People regarding how these issues are being taken forward by the Government.

Though not yet implemented, Northern Ireland look set to introduce a Scottish-inspired Housing Options preventative approach in the near future (Mahaffy, 2013<sup>18</sup>) and indeed, a 2010 report examining homelessness among 16-25 year olds in Northern Ireland identified missed opportunities for early intervention and prevention work in the jurisdiction, identifying particular demand for mediation services (CHNI, 2010; Maguire, 2011).

The Housing Options approach to prevention has proved controversial across each of the three UK jurisdictions in which it has been implemented. Criticisms that assertive 'prevention' is being used as a form of gatekeeping - i.e. to unlawfully direct people away from making a formal homelessness application without helping to resolve their housing issue – have endured, fuelled by legal challenges to local authorities, official evaluations and voluntary sector 'exposés' of bad practice. Pawson et al (2007) and Quilgars et al (2008) provide a summary of early critical perspectives on the issue of gatekeeping. More recently, the Local Government Ombudsman (2011) and Dobie et al (2014) have presented evidence that gatekeeping remains commonplace in England, offering specific examples of young people not receiving the help they are entitled to. In a review of the impact of homelessness legislation in Wales, Mackie et al (2012b) highlighted concerns that homelessness

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<sup>16</sup> The HPSG meets three times a year with membership from across local and national government, the NHS and voluntary organisations. Updates on homelessness and young people is a standing item on the Group's agenda.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/74872.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> And see <http://housingrights.org.uk/news/housing-options-way-forward>

prevention was being used as a gatekeeping tool by some local authorities, an issue that informed the radical redrawing of the Welsh statutory framework in 2014 (see below). The EOC inquiry in Scotland (EOC, 2014) has similarly shed light on the inappropriate diversion of young people away from making a homelessness application, with concerns that levels of homelessness are being systematically under-reported in the official homelessness statistics as a result.

More optimistically, Pawson et al (2007) concluded that the rapid decline in statutory homelessness acceptances in England from 2003 (see chapter 3) “at least in part... reflect[s] the growing impact of homelessness prevention practices in constructively helping people avoid being without accommodation” (p161). Writing about the housing options approach as applied to young people specifically, Quilgars et al (2008), though acknowledging that “concerns about gatekeeping... have some grounding in reality” (p58), concluded that “the vast majority of providers and young people that took part in the review were very supportive of the principles underpinning the prevention agenda” (p112), “felt that new practices had improved service delivery” (pxiii) and moreover argued that there “was a strong call to take this prevention agenda further” (p112). The same review concluded that mediation was key to the success of prevention work with young people who present as homeless having been asked to leave the family home.

Notwithstanding these cautiously positive conclusions, and as recently highlighted by a Scottish Housing Regulator inquiry into housing options preventative practice in Scotland (Scottish Housing Regulator, 2014), there remains a tension between the application of Housing Options and the formal requirements of homelessness legislation. After recently introducing reformulated statutory homelessness legislation, Wales appears to be the first UK jurisdiction to “unambiguously resolve” (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c, p69) this tension, obviating the question of gatekeeping – and thus risk of legal challenge – by introducing an explicit legal duty to prevent homelessness that precedes any rehousing duty that might be owed where homelessness occurs.

Since April 2015<sup>19</sup>, Welsh local authorities have been required to take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. The new ‘prevention duty’ is subject to the availability of resources in a local area, but applies irrespective of priority need, intentionality or local connection<sup>20</sup>. Where these prevention and relief efforts are unsuccessful and the individual is deemed in priority need and unintentionally homeless<sup>21</sup>, the local authority has a duty to secure accommodation, albeit that duty does not apply where applicants are seen to have “unreasonably failed to cooperate” during the prevention stage. The Welsh Government have also committed to further extending the statutory safety net by requiring local authorities (from 2019) to accommodate intentionally homeless families and 16/17 year olds, unless they have been found intentionally homeless in the last five years. The new legislation does however *remove* automatic priority need status from prison leavers,

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<sup>19</sup> Relevant sections of The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 came into force on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Priority need and local connection are taken into account at the ‘relief stage’ i.e. where the applicant is already homeless and the local authority has a duty to ‘help to secure’ alternative accommodation in order to a) determine which households are owed temporary accommodation (those who may be in priority need), and b) determine which households can be referred to another local authority (where there is no local connection).

<sup>21</sup> Local connection rules also still apply but only where the local authority has stated that it is investigating local connection for this group.

reverting Wales to the wider UK position (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c for a full account of the new Welsh Framework).

It will not be possible to make definitive statements regarding the impact of the new Welsh system on levels of and experiences of homelessness (and youth homelessness specifically) for some time, but it should be noted that the ultimate shape of the legislation falls short of the more ambitious and inclusive proposals made by the Mackie et al (2012a) in their review commissioned to inform the reforms (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c). Nevertheless, key informants in this study were broadly positive about the implications for young homeless people in Wales:

*“it's definitely a step in the right direction in terms of firming up that duty and having to evidence what help you've taken with... young single people, and making sure that we aren't just simply giving out a leaflet and saying, 'Off you go.' We have got a duty there to offer genuine prevention activity, genuine help to try and find them accommodation.”*  
(Local Government representative, Wales)

Consideration of how in practice the new framework affects young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Wales will be a key task for the Welsh Government over the next few years, something that may prove challenging in light of concerns about the absence of robust expectation and monitoring frameworks for the new regime (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c).

### The role of the PRS

England and Wales have instituted a further significant shift in the nature of the entitlement owed under the main homelessness duty (the stage 2 duty in Wales). Historically, the rehousing duty has in the great majority of cases been fulfilled through the offer of a social rented tenancy, with local authorities only able to discharge the duty into the (less secure) PRS with the consent of the applicant. It is this feature of UK homelessness policy that has been seen to create a ‘perverse incentive’ for those seeking social housing to fabricate or engineer a situation of homelessness in order to get priority access to public housing. Of particular relevance here is the scope for ‘collusion’ between young people and those who accommodate them (parents, guardians or other hosts) in engineering the young person’s homelessness by claiming that they are unwilling to continue to accommodate the young person, though the fine line between collusion and ‘genuine homelessness’ was noted by Fitzpatrick and Pawson (2007).

This ‘perverse incentive’ has been substantially weakened however from November 2012 in England and April 2015 in Wales<sup>22</sup>, where local authorities are now able to discharge the main homelessness duty through an offer of PRS accommodation<sup>23</sup> without the consent of the applicant (Fitzpatrick et al 2015b and c)<sup>24</sup>. According to a 2014 survey of English local

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<sup>22</sup> In England, under provisions introduced in the Localism Act 2011; in Wales under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

<sup>23</sup> In England, the PRS offer must be for a 12 month minimum period. In Wales, a six month minimum tenancy length is required. This difference should be understood in the context of imminent tenancy law reform in Wales. See section on the Renting Homes (Wales) Bill in Fitzpatrick et al (2015c).

<sup>24</sup> It is also worth noting that in England only, social housing providers can now offer new tenants fixed term or ‘flexible’ tenancies with a minimum term of two years, rather than the traditional and secure ‘assured’ tenancy (Fitzpatrick et al, 2014c).

authorities, over half reported that they had adopted these new powers with a further 16% expecting to do so by 2016 (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). Whilst offering potential to ease the pressure on social housing, this development is also concerning given that the ending of PRS tenancies is now the primary cause of statutory homelessness in England (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). Fitzpatrick et al (2015b, p17) see this development – alongside a strong embrace of the ‘informal’ housing options preventative approach – as not only a move to a more informal and localised system (given local authority flexibilities), but also a “major shift in the ‘incentive architecture’” facing those in housing need who may in some cases now be better served (or at least retain greater choice in their housing outcomes) via the housing options route than via a statutory homeless application. As such, the idea that local authorities are ‘gatekeeping’ by promoting the housing options route (rather than enabling the best outcomes for the applicant) may require reappraisal.

In Wales, this shift has prompted controversy given the minimum 6 month tenancy length required in cases of PRS discharge (compared to the 12 month minimum in England) (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c), albeit that a detailed toolkit on accessing the PRS and working with private landlords has been developed by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA, 2014).

To date, there are no signs of any appetite to introduce compulsory discharge into the PRS in Scotland. The situation is somewhat less clear in Northern Ireland: although no moves have been made to enable the discharge of duty to ‘Full Duty Applicants’ into the PRS without their consent, increasing the use of and access to the PRS was a key focus of the 2012-17 Homelessness Strategy (NIHE, 2012) and is also likely to be central to the seemingly imminent move towards to ‘housing options’ style approach in the jurisdiction. A voluntary sector youth homelessness provider in Northern Ireland expressed concern about the dependence of the homelessness strategy on securing PRS landlord participation in a context where landlords show some reluctance to accommodate benefit dependant, vulnerable and/or young prospective tenants.

## **Non-statutory homelessness**

Young people experiencing homelessness but not entitled to assistance under the homelessness legislation (e.g. because they are not deemed to be in ‘priority need’) can nevertheless access a range of ‘non statutory’ services and supports provided and/or funded by Central Government, local authorities, voluntary organisations or housing associations. Crucially, as these supports operate outside the statutory framework, availability and access will depend on organisational decisions about resource allocation, service provision and organisational priorities and eligibility criteria, albeit that Central Government funding and priorities offer strong incentives for provision in certain areas.

It should be noted that the ‘non statutorily’ homeless group in England and Northern Ireland will include young people deemed to be homeless, but not in priority need, whereas in Scotland it will only include applicants deemed to be ineligible or intentionally homeless. Following recent reforms, in Wales, non-priority applicants have an entitlement to assistance to prevent their homelessness. It should further be noted that one subgroup of the non-statutory homeless are the ‘hidden homeless’ who by definition are not accessing services, but are nevertheless living in inadequate or insecure situations (see chapter 3).



A 2010 review of single homelessness in the UK demonstrated improved service responses over the preceding decade (Jones and Pleace, 2010). Key aspects of this positive story were:

- A shift from ‘warehousing’ single homeless people in hostels and night shelters, towards ‘resettlement’, encompassing a focus on tenancy sustainment, social networks and education, training and employment;
- An increased emphasis on homelessness prevention and the requirement for local authorities to develop local homelessness strategies;
- The introduction of the Supporting People funding stream in 2003, which provided ‘housing related’ support for vulnerable groups, including homeless people and those at risk of homelessness;
- Improvements in hostel provision and outcomes for service users through the Hostels Capital Improvement programme;
- Continued prioritisation and development of new initiatives to tackle rough sleeping in England, Wales and Scotland.

The remainder of this section considers the main types of services and support available to young non-statutory homeless households, focussing on changes in the service provision, investment and government policy since 2010.

### **Advice and assistance**

Local authorities are required to provide free advice and assistance to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness (regardless of priority need and intentionality tests). There have been longstanding concerns however about the inadequacy and poor quality of advice given to non-statutory homeless households seeking advice in light of the incentive for local authorities to focus their efforts on resolving the needs of those likely to be owed the main homelessness duty (Jones and Pleace, 2010; Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). A recent mystery shopping exercise of local authority housing departments in England highlighted bad practice in this area, particularly in London, where local authorities frequently failing to give meaningful or correct information (Dobie et al, 2014). These findings echo the results of a study (Mackie and Thomas, 2014) comparing experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain which found that of respondents (total sample n=480) who had recently sought assistance from a local authority, 15% received only general advice and 27% received no advice at all. This latter figure rose to 35% in London and was much lower (16%) in Scotland. These findings must however be interpreted in the context of the “extreme pressure” local authority homelessness services have been subject to in recent years, facing increasing demand in a climate of overall budget cuts<sup>25</sup> (total ‘case actions’ increased by 9% in the last year and are now 36% higher than in 2009/10) (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b, p18).

### **Prevention and relief activity**

In 2002, New Labour introduced an obligation for English local authorities to develop prevention-focused homelessness strategies and strongly promoted the ‘housing options’

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<sup>25</sup> Central Government funding for homelessness prevention activities has been to some extent protected from ‘austerity cuts’, but this has not been sufficient to compensate for the significant impact of large cuts to Supporting People funding and wider local authority budgets (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b).

model. Wales and Scotland have subsequently introduced similar approaches, with Northern Ireland expected to follow suit in the near future (see above). This 'preventative turn' was intended to encourage a move away from the legalistic rationing of local authorities' support under the statutory system and instead enable a more proactive problem solving response to the needs of those approaching their local authority for help with housing. Within this context local authorities now undertake a range of informal and 'non-statutory' homelessness prevention and relief activities. This includes offering debt advice or financial assistance; family mediation or conciliation services; sanctuary schemes for victims of domestic violence and or help to obtain alternative accommodation. It is important to note that the Homelessness Prevention Grant funding this activity has been relatively protected from the substantial cuts made to broader DCLG budgets, with a further £18.5 million made available to support sub-regional partnerships to tackle single homelessness (DCLG, 2012; Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). That said, the future of the Homelessness Prevention Fund is not yet entirely clear, with Homeless Link calling for the government to commit to continued investment in this area (Homeless Link, 2014a), and with concerns about the absorption (and lack of ring fencing) of this funding within broader local authority budgets (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013).

In a 2014 survey of English local authorities, some reported being able to offer "a broader and more inclusive service"<sup>26</sup> (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b, p19) in this context, with some stating that no distinction is made in the service options offered to those likely to be priority and non-priority at the prevention stage. Moreover, half of responding authorities claimed that the quality and extent of assistance offered to non-priority applicants had improved since 2010, with one third saying standards had been maintained and only one sixth reporting a deterioration. Fitzpatrick et al (2015b) recommend caution in interpreting this apparently positive story however, noting that: first, these statistics mark regional differences, with London and Midland local authorities more likely to report a deterioration in the quality/extent of service now provided to non-priority homeless since 2010; second, the question is explicitly relative and comments that services have improved for this group do not necessarily indicate that they are now good or even adequate (see also Dobie et al, 2014); third, the positive findings are at odds with the 23% decline in homelessness relief activities offered by local authorities over the previous two years (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). It also sits uneasily with the identification of other trends affecting the non-statutory homelessness group (particularly in England) namely: increasingly strict interpretations of vulnerability criteria;<sup>27</sup> poor quality advice and gatekeeping (see above); increased use of local connection criteria in single homelessness projects; and a decrease in the number of bed spaces available in accommodation projects for single homeless people (Homeless Link, 2015b).

### **Accommodation projects and housing support**

Non-statutorily homeless young people can (subject to capacity and organisational eligibility criteria) also access emergency, temporary or transitional homeless accommodation

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<sup>26</sup> Similar comments have been made in Scotland where the more recently adopted Housing Options approach has been described as representing a "solutions-based, person-centred approach" (Scottish Housing Regulator, 2014, p5) and a shift "from "who can we help?" to "how can we help?" (Scottish Government, 2012, p7). The key difference between Scotland and England in this regard is that single homeless people in Scotland are likely to be owed the main homelessness duty where prevention work fails, whereas in England they are not. The inclusion of non-statutory households in English local authorities' prevention and relief activities is thus particularly crucial in understanding how well their housing needs are met.

<sup>27</sup> Although the recent Supreme Court judgement may help to counter this in the future (see above).



projects. Access may be on an emergency night-by-night basis (e.g. for those accessing No Second Night Out (NSNO) or Nightstop bed spaces, see below) or offer longer-term (usually six months to two years) transitional housing and support (e.g. supported accommodation projects, foyers and Supported Lodgings). The 2015 Homeless Link survey of services for single homeless people identified a 5% decline in the number of bed spaces available in (all age) accommodation projects over the last year (Homeless Link, 2015b), which marks a continuation of longer term trends (bed spaces decreased by 11% between 2010 and 2013) (Homeless Link, 2013c).

This decline likely reflects a combination of factors impacting on the major funding streams of accommodation projects,<sup>28</sup> not least the removal of the 'ring fence' around local authorities' Supporting People funding in 2009, which enabled local authorities to deprioritise housing support services if they chose to,<sup>29</sup> and in addition, the substantial cuts to housing related support (previously known as Supporting People) budgets. Local Authority support budgets for single homeless people have reportedly reduced by 26% in the three years to 2013/14 (Spurr, 2014a) with 'housing welfare support' cut by 46% in real terms over the past five years (Perry, 2014, see also NAO, 2014). In addition, accommodation projects have been adversely effected by Housing Benefit restrictions (see below) and the increase in benefit sanctions, which is widely reported to have impacted on residents' ability to pay service charges (Beatty et al, 2015). In 2015, 41% of accommodation projects experienced a decrease in their funding (Homeless Link, 2015b).

Some accommodation projects are generic (catering for all ages); others are youth specific. In their annual analysis of a UK homelessness services database, Homeless Link (2014d) reported that almost all accommodation projects accept under 25 year olds, with 62% accepting 16/17 year olds and 43% catering exclusively for young people. The high proportion of youth-specific projects reflects a general consensus that age specific hostels offer better accommodation, tailored support and safer environments for young people than do all-age projects (Quilgars et al, 2008). It has also been argued that such models may be more appropriate for some young people than 'normal' dispersed housing units given that many will have little or no experience maintaining independent accommodation (Gaetz, 2014b, cf. Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007).

There is evidence that youth specific hostels that integrate supported accommodation with employment and training support (i.e. the Foyer model) effectively support young people's transition through homelessness in terms of positive housing and psycho-social outcomes, particularly for those with relatively low support needs<sup>30</sup> (Steen and Mackenzie, 2013; Johnsen and Watts, 2014). The limited available evidence suggests that Foyer-like models may be less successful in achieving positive employment outcomes and alleviating the low income/poverty their residents are likely to experience, both whilst living in and after moving on from the Foyer (Smith and Browne, 2006; Steen and Mackenzie, 2013; Johnsen and Watts, 2014). Their capacity to achieve positive outcomes in these regards must of course be interpreted in light of the heavy influence of housing and labour market conditions (Smith,

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<sup>28</sup> Benefit payments, rent/service charges and housing related support/Supporting People funding together make up the three dominant funding sources of accommodation projects (Homeless Link, 2015b).

<sup>29</sup> In 2011-12, Supporting People funding (now known as Housing Related Support) was rolled into the single Formula Grant allocated to local authorities.

<sup>30</sup> Australian evidence suggests the model may be less effective for young homeless people with mental illnesses and/or physical or psychological barriers to education and employment (Grace et al, 2011).

2004), but also relevant are ‘work disincentive’ effects that result from the reduction of benefits and escalating rental costs as residents begin to work (Stone, 2010). This is not a problem specific to Foyers/youth hostels specially (BAOH, 2009; Johnsen and Watts, 2014), but may be more acute than in other supported accommodation given the potentially higher levels of support – and thus rental costs – associated with youth specific programmes. This issue (as well as broader affordability issues brought about by welfare reform, see below) has led to the development of some shared accommodation projects catering specifically to young people in education, employment and training (see chapter 5), which were reported to be available in 43% of local authorities responding to Homeless Link’s survey (Homeless Link, 2014d).

Notwithstanding evidence on the effectiveness and limitations of Foyer-like models, concerns remain about the disadvantages and negative impacts of both all-age and youth specific hostel accommodation<sup>31</sup> as a response to homelessness. Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin (2007) observe that hostel living “requires a special competence which is quite different from living independently” (p77) and thus, at best, may not help in developing young people’s ‘housing readiness’, and at worst, may lead to institutionalisation. Benjaminsen (2013) similarly highlights the “risk for social conflicts, stress and an environment marked by addiction problems and other social problems” (p127) young people face in congregate housing. In a study involving over one hundred 16-24 year olds with experience of homelessness in the North East of England, Stone (2010) highlights particular concerns about the personal safety of those residing in hostel accommodation. In addition, he highlights the potential for coercion, harassment, bullying and negative peer pressure (include around drug and alcohol use) to occur in these communal living environments.

These issues are likely to be exacerbated given the high proportion of young homeless people reported to have support needs relating to drug and alcohol use and psychological, behavioural and mental health issues (see chapter 4). Problematic behaviour is said to be increasingly likely in hostel environments, heightening the risk of eviction and a return to homelessness for the most vulnerable residents. Stone (2010) also highlighted young people’s vulnerability to sexual exploitation in hostel settings, a theme echoed in the interim report of the Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (Berelowitz et al, 2012). Evidence submitted to the inquiry suggested that all women’s hostels were used as recruiting grounds for pimps, with older women residents being coerced into recruiting younger (16/17 year old) residents into street-based sex work.

Such concerns have led to calls for improvements in the standards of hostel provision – for instance, a reduction in the size of hostels and better staff training, pay and conditions (Stone, 2010) – beyond the gains made under the Hostel Capital Improvement programme. In 2014, two investment programmes – Homeless Change and Platform for Life – were announced, both running 2015-17 with investment across the programmes totalling £40 million<sup>32</sup>. The former aims to provide tailored hostel accommodation with facilities that enable the delivery of provision of healthcare, training or education for rough sleepers. The latter

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<sup>31</sup> Despite his overwhelmingly negative conclusions regarding the effectiveness of hostel accommodation, Stone (2010) cautions against generalisations given the heterogeneity of hostels. For an account of this diversity see Stone (2010, pp. 20-21).

<sup>32</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-expanding-support-to-beat-homelessness>

targets young people specifically and aims to fund organisations to develop low rent/affordable shared accommodation for 18-24 year olds who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, who have low support needs and are not in priority need under the statutory homelessness system. The aim of the programme is to:

*“provide a stable place to live, where residents can be supported into training and education, linked effectively into existing health services, and encouraged into long-term employment, independence and healthy living. This is not intended to be supported housing in the traditional sense, but is aimed at young people with low support needs who want to work or study, but need stable accommodation in order to be able to do so” (HCA, 2015, p4).*

Concerns about hostels have also led to efforts to increase the availability of alternative non-institutional models of temporary accommodation, including Supported Lodgings<sup>33</sup> and Nightstop<sup>34</sup>, that seek to enable a young person to avoid rough sleeping or unsuitable temporary accommodation via placements with private households – often while family mediation/reconciliation work is undertaken to try and enable young people to return to the family home (CLG, 2008; Becket et al, 2010; NCAS et al, 2011; Insley, 2011). The government has further invested £12.5 million to develop private rented accommodation options for single homeless people<sup>35</sup>, including shared accommodation projects and pre-tenancy work<sup>36</sup>, with the evaluations of these schemes indicating successful outcomes working with young people and ex-offenders (Rugg, 2014) and proposing a number of models of shared accommodation to pursue (Batty et al, 2015).

### Resettlement support

In their review of single homelessness, Jones and Pleace (2010) identified particular improvements over the 2000-10 period in terms of resettlement work and floating support (or ‘tenancy sustainment’) provision. They described such support as playing a dual role, both preventing homelessness recurring (through the early loss of a new tenancy) and in aiding previously homeless people’s transition to independent living, in terms of supporting the development of life skills (budgeting, cooking etc.), as well as facilitating integration into the local community and fostering employment/education opportunities (Jones and Pleace, 2010). The un-ringfencing of Supporting People and subsequent cuts to housing related support budgets discussed above have reduced the resources available for these kinds of support. In 2013, Homeless Link’s review of the changing funding arrangement for housing support identified a particular gap in the provision of floating support, which seemed to have lost out to accommodation based services in local authority commissioning in an increasingly constrained financial climate (Homeless Link, 2013d). Echoing these concerns, key informants in Fitzpatrick et al’s (2013, 2015b) study suggested that the reduction in such low

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<sup>33</sup> Supported Lodgings provide a young person a room in a private home. The host provides a safe and supportive environment, working with professional services to support the young person in the transition back to the family home or to independent living. Placements can be to meet a crisis need, for one night to six weeks, or longer term for up to 2-3 years (see CLG, 2008 for more information).

<sup>34</sup> Nightstop projects provide emergency accommodation for young people in the homes of approved and trained volunteers. Placements last from one night to longer periods depending on host availability and the young person’s needs.

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-private-renting-funding.html> and <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/housing-service-private-renting-programme-2014-63130.html>

<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/sharing-solutions-programme.html>

intensity support services may be one factor contributing to rising levels of rough sleeping. Moreover, in a study seeking to identify the key challenges likely to face young people in 2020, Clapham et al (2012) cite the reduction of funding of housing related support as one of the most important factors likely to contribute to a higher number of young people experiencing chaotic housing pathways and being unable to sustain tenancies.

There is a rather more positive story regarding this kind of support in the devolved nations. In Wales, housing related support remains ring-fenced and as yet, cuts to the allocation of relevant funds to Wales have not been on the scale of equivalent cuts in England (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c). In Northern Ireland, there has been a strong emphasis on the provision of floating support in responding to homelessness and such services have expanded in recent years (NIHE/SP, 2012; NIHE, 2012). In addition, for the time being, relevant funds remain ring fenced. It should be noted however that the full effects of welfare reform and budget cuts are yet to be felt in Northern Ireland. In Scotland, as in England, housing related support funds are no longer ring fenced, but it might be hoped that the housing support duty that came into force in 2013 may provide some protection to recently homeless households in need of assistance in maintaining their tenancies.

### Rough sleeping

Rough sleeping has been accorded policy priority by a succession of administrations in England, initially via the London-focused Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) of 1990, followed by the pan-England RSI from 1996. These initiatives were in part prompted by the growth of visible rough sleeping, including amongst young people, in the 1980s. Rough sleeping was also a key focus of New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit, set up in 1997. In 2000, the Unit adopted a particular focus on preventing young people and care leavers sleeping rough, sparking the establishment of a range of accommodation and independent living initiatives across the country (Wilson, 2015c). 2008 saw a new strategy on rough sleeping launched and a target to end rough sleeping by 2012 announced. In 2009, the Mayor of London committed to ending rough sleeping in the capital within the same timescale. This work led to "a strong focus on highly targeted and 'personalised' interventions to address the needs of the most 'entrenched' rough sleepers" (Fitzpatrick et al, 2011, p5).

The 2010-15 Coalition Government continued to prioritise and invest in responses to rough sleeping, setting up the Homelessness Transition Fund (£20 million over three years) in 2011 to support the roll-out of the 'No Second Night Out' (NSNO) approach (piloted in London in 2011) across England, amongst other initiatives. NSNO aims to combine improved early identification of rough sleepers with assertive outreach and credible alternatives to rough sleeping based on individual assessments. Under NSNO, rough sleepers are generally presented with a 'single service offer' (SSO), and if they do not have a local connection to the area they sleep rough in this may involve 'reconnection' to their home area (whether in the UK or further afield) (Homeless Link, 2014b). Declining a SSO can lead to exclusion from a network of local authority funded homelessness services (Johnsen and Jones, 2015).

Two evaluations of NSNO have reached positive conclusions about the capacity of the approach to move and keep people off the streets (Broadway et al, 2011; Homeless Link, 2014b). Client monitoring data reported last year suggested that two thirds of rough sleepers targeted left the street after the first night, with 78% of those helped to stop rough sleeping not returning after receiving help (Homeless Link, 2014b). Moreover, two thirds of providers

and local authorities surveyed in the same study reported an improvement in responses to rough sleeping in their area. Data limitations however make it hard to assess the long-term outcomes of 'reconnected' rough sleepers, with a recent study highlighting the risks that rough sleepers may be reconnected to areas in which they lack support networks and/or may face inadequate service responses, with further risks for those without recognised local connection anywhere in the UK and who are unable to prove they are at risk of harm in their home area (Johnsen and Jones, 2015). There is as yet no specific evidence on the relative effectiveness of these interventions for younger rough sleepers, though in some areas NSNO services offer alternative accommodation options to under 25s (e.g. Nightstop services).

The period 2010-15 also saw the launch of a number of other funding streams in this area<sup>37</sup>. Of particular relevance to young people is the joint DCLG/Cabinet office £15 million Fair Chance Fund, which is supporting seven projects for three years from January 2015. These Social Impact Bonds specifically target young homeless people with the most complex needs<sup>38</sup>. Providers will be able to claim 'outcomes payments' where targeted young people sustain accommodation for certain periods, achieve specific levels of qualifications and/or enter and sustain employment<sup>39</sup>.

In sum, the Coalition Government's period in office saw considerable investment in a number of programmes tackling rough sleeping and the allied 'complex needs' agenda. Partly in view of increasing evidence on the experiences and the cost to the public purse of the 'complex needs' group (i.e. those who experience some combination of substance misuse issues, offending and homelessness), and evidence suggesting that the bulk of this group are aged 25-44 rather than under 25<sup>40</sup> (Fitzpatrick et al, 2012a; Bramley et al, 2015), the most recent report from the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness (published under the Coalition Government) indicates a desire to increasingly focus on single homeless people with complex needs aged over 25 (DCLG, 2015). The Government has justified this stance on grounds of the 'strengthened offer' for young people at risk of homelessness via the Youth Accommodation Pathway and Fair Chance Fund, although it may prove controversial to the youth homelessness sector at a time when the pressures on young people – and the numbers of young people sleeping rough – appear to be increasing (see chapter 3). It is also worth noting that these funding programmes are relatively small-scale, support locally focused and tightly targeted service provision and are time limited. As such, and as noted by Fitzpatrick et al (2015b), they cannot compensate for wider and less positive trends, namely, substantial cuts to housing related support budgets (see above) and

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<sup>37</sup> The Homelessness Change and Platform for Life funds; the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond; the Homeless Hospital Discharge Fund; the Help for Single Homeless fund and the Big Lottery Fund's 'Fulfilling Lives' Programme.

<sup>38</sup> That is 18-24 year olds considered statutorily homeless, but not in priority need, who are not in employment education or training; not able to be accommodated in supporting housing due to e.g. previous eviction, serious offending histories; who have complex needs (substance misuse, significant mental health issues, learning disability or personality disorders), but who do not reach the threshold for adult social care services.

<sup>39</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/23-million-to-help-homeless-turn-around-their-lives>

<sup>40</sup> A recent administrative data-linkage project has indicated that those experiencing 'severe and multiple deprivation' (some combination of homelessness, substance misuse, and offending behaviours) are most likely to be 25-45 year olds. Nevertheless, a significant minority (25%) of those experiencing severe and multiple deprivation were under 25 (Bramley et al, 2015).

welfare and housing entitlements, the latter of which particularly affect under 25 year olds (see below).

Relatively lower priority has been accorded to the issue of rough sleeping in Northern Ireland, albeit that there are rough sleeper strategies in the urban centres where street homelessness is understood to be concentrated. In Wales, a Rough Sleepers Group has been set up to better understand the prevalence of rough sleeping after some contention over the required policy response during the development of the Housing (Wales) Act (2014).

The issue has garnered rather more attention in Scotland, where a Rough Sleepers Initiative was launched in 1997, followed two years later by the Glasgow focused Street Homelessness Review Team. The broadening and deepening of the statutory safety net during the 2000s and roll out of a preventative Housing Options approach since 2011 have been a primary focus of attention in Scotland. While these developments were expected to benefit rough sleepers (as well as other groups experiencing homelessness) there is growing concern that even Scotland's uniquely robust legal framework does not effectively meet the needs of this group (Harleigh-Bell, 2015). It is in this light that the combined issues of rough sleeping, multiple exclusion and complex needs are receiving increasing attention from the Scottish Government and other key stakeholders in the homelessness sector (Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group, 2015).

## **Welfare policies**

A further crucial aspect of the context in which youth homelessness is prevented and responded to lies beyond homelessness specific laws, policies and interventions and in the wider welfare safety net that operates to assist those in crisis, out of work and/or on a low income that does not meet their basic needs. In particular, social security payments and housing allowances are the aspects of welfare policy that have traditionally 'broken the link' between being out of work or in poverty and being homeless (Stephens et al, 2010), or in the case of young people, between lacking family support or the means to live independently and being homeless.

This section reviews the substantial changes to this welfare safety net and wider support available to young people that have occurred since 2008, largely – though not exclusively – as a consequence of the radical welfare reform programme of the 2010-15 Coalition Government. The section focuses on those aspects of reform that are of most import to under 25s at risk of or experiencing homelessness<sup>41</sup>.

### **Housing Benefit**

A number of reforms to Housing Benefit (HB) entitlements have substantially affected both: a) who is eligible for assistance; and b) the level of assistance they receive. New Labour piloted reforms to the level of rent HB recipients may receive from 2002, and rolled out the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) regime in 2008. By introducing payment ceilings within

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<sup>41</sup> For the most recent accounts of the impact of welfare reform on homelessness see Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b and associated reports for other UK nations at <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html>. For an overview from the perspective of homelessness service providers and youth service providers specifically see Homeless Link (2015b and 2014a) respectively.



'broad rental market areas', LHA aims to provide a transparent means of ensuring that tenants in similar circumstances in the same area receive similar levels of housing support. Concerns about these reforms from a homelessness perspective focused on the requirement that rent should be paid direct to tenants, rather than landlords (a position subsequently amended, see below), and there is some evidence that the shift eased access to the PRS for low income households in some areas due to the more appropriate calculation of eligible rent levels and the incentive the reforms created for claimants to seek sub-LHA rate tenancies<sup>42</sup> (Fitzpatrick et al, 2011).

Concerns about the increasing costs of HB payments (due to a sharp rise in claimant numbers), combined with equity concerns that HB enabled claimants to access properties that working households could not afford in some areas, prompted proposals for further reform, which were taken forward by the newly elected Coalition Government. Under the new system (fully implemented in 2012) maximum rates were: based on 30<sup>th</sup> percentile rather than median market rents in every area; capped at actual rent levels (removing the potential claimant saving of £15); and capped nationally (with capped rates for different dwelling sizes and the maximum rate being for a 4 bed roomed property). The reforms appear to have had modest or minimal effects in reducing rent inflation, particularly in London (Beatty et al, 2014; Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). Furthermore, landlords are increasingly reporting increases in rent arrears directly linked to these reform as higher proportions of PRS HB claimants are struggling to pay their rent, sometimes asking family members for financial help and/or having to go without household essentials to do so (Beatty et al, 2014). Beatty et al (2014) note that young people appear particularly likely to be economising in this way. These pressures are likely to worsen in light of the four year freeze on LHA rates (and other working age benefits) announced in the 2015 Summer Budget (see below).

In addition, 2012 saw the extension of the 'shared accommodation rate' (SAR) to single claimants aged 25-34, as well as to those under 25 (who have been subject to lower entitlements intended to cover only shared accommodation since 1996). The intention of this restriction is best interpreted as a combination of wishing to disincentivise independent living among young people (specifically among would be HB claimants), acknowledging that many in this age group share accommodation (thus ensuring equity between claimant and non-claimants), and seeking to limit overall HB expenditure (Stephens et al, 2015). The extension of SAR clearly has particularly impacted on 25-34 year old HB claimants who lost entitlement to HB that covers the cost of self-contained accommodation. In a DWP evaluation of the impacts, almost one third of landlords in Inner London (and 17% overall) reported no longer being willing to let to under 35s (Beatty et al, 2014). The situation of parents in this age group with intermittent caring responsibilities for their children is a source of continuing concern (Centre for Housing Policy, 2011; Batty et al, 2015).

A number of broader effects have also been flagged which will impact most acutely on under 25 year olds, in particular: increasing competition for shared PRS accommodation given; firstly, the limited availability of shared accommodation that is affordable under "very low" SAR rates (Wilcox et al, 2015, p14; see also Sanders and Teixeira, 2012; Homeless Link, 2013a; EOC, 2014); and secondly, the likelihood that younger households – in addition to those with complex needs and other vulnerable and/or stigmatised groups – will be less

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<sup>42</sup> As tenants who did so were able to keep up to £15 pounds of the gap between rent/LHA levels.

desirable than older people/less vulnerable groups when competing for rooms in shared housing (Centre for Housing Policy, 2011). Research has also highlighted the likelihood that 'strangers' and more diverse age groups sharing will lead to greater conflict and less stable tenancies and, more concerning, safeguarding concerns for the youngest and most vulnerable sharers. The particular challenges faced by those with mental health issues in sharing arrangements are another area of concern. In response to fears that SAR was making it considerably harder to move hostel residents into settled accommodation, an exemption was introduced for 25-34 year olds who have been in a homeless hostel for three months or more (leading to some concern about the 'perverse' impact this may have at a time when the focus is on minimising length of stay in hostels, Fitzpatrick et al, 2011). Ex-offenders who pose a serious risk to the public have also been exempted, and care leavers remain exempted until their 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, but all other vulnerable groups remain subject to SAR rates.

Overall, SAR is widely considered to have contributed to increased levels of homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b; see also EOC, 2014) and has certainly been instrumental (in combination with broader LHA reforms) in the very significant decline in the number of young single HB claimants – down 24.7% between December 2011 and August 2014 and by two fifths in London (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b; Wilcox et al, 2015). These trends clearly raise concerns about where these young people are being 'displaced' to, both in terms of geography (potentially being driven away from social networks and areas of labour market demand) and housing circumstances (potentially being driven into poor quality, overcrowded housing, sofa-surfing etc.).

The removal of the spare room subsidy, widely known as the 'Bedroom Tax' – introduced in 2013 and leading to a cut in HB entitlement to out of work tenants deemed to be under occupying their social rented sector properties<sup>43</sup> – has been seen to impact detrimentally on young people in some parts of the UK (Barnardo's, 2014)<sup>44</sup>. The 'Bedroom Tax' has affected different parts of the UK to different extents: the North West of England and Wales have been particularly heavily hit (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b and c), but impacts have been less severe in Scotland (where Scottish Government funds have been allocated to mitigate the impacts) and Northern Ireland (where the introduction of the reforms was both much later and phased in more gently).

Though much of the controversy has focused on existing social tenants now facing a shortfall in their HB relative to their rent – and in particular on the impacts on disabled people (Wilcox, 2014) – a less direct impact has been on homeless people seeking to move on from temporary accommodation. In areas where there has historically been a mismatch in the size of the social housing stock and demand, single people have been allocated larger social rented sector dwellings than they need, but this is now a more difficult option as: (1) competition for smaller dwellings has increased given the need to transfer existing tenants affected by the 'Bedroom Tax' and (2) this is a less affordable option given the shortfall of HB payments relative to rents (EOC, 2014). As a Barnardo's report focussing on accommodation options for care leavers comments, this "leaves a difficult choice for young

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<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that the criteria used are generally considered to be out-dated and ungenerous (Wilcox, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> Though greater controversy has surrounded the impact on other groups – namely households including people with disabilities (Wilcox, 2014).



people and their advisers between social housing, with the penalty of the 'Bedroom Tax', and less stable private renting" (Barnardo's, 2014, p10). Many young people will in any case lack the opportunity to choose social housing given the falling number of social let's available in the sector (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013) and social landlord's increasing reluctance to accommodate groups likely to struggle to pay their rent (Smith Institute, 2015; Spurr, 2015). Regarding the 'Bedroom Tax' specifically, there has been some suggestion that in creating an incentive for potentially affected tenants to keep young people living at home, it may in some circumstances reduce the likelihood of family exclusions and thus youth homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c).

Migrants have been subject to specific cuts in their HB entitlements (in addition to wider cuts to their welfare entitlements). In 2014, regulations came into force meaning that European Economic Area (EEA) migrant 'work-seekers' making a new claim will no longer be entitled to HB. This change is feared to lead to increases in overcrowding in substandard conditions and rises in levels of rough sleeping and destitution among those impacted (Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC), 2014b; Fitzpatrick et al, 2015a and b). Centrepont has highlighted the substantial challenges now faced by young people affected by this change who came to the UK at a young age, have very limited connections and networks in their country of origin and who may have recently left education and thus find it difficult to immediately enter work (Centrepont, 2014a). If young people in these circumstances become homeless due to estrangement from this family, they face very limited welfare support and few other options.

In the context of this range of reforms to HB entitlements it is important to note the increasing role that Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) have come to play under the welfare reform agenda. First introduced in 2001 and affecting a few thousand households, DHPs have come to play a central role in the welfare reform agenda, with local authorities able to – on a localised and discretionary basis – award payments to mitigate the impacts of the 'Bedroom Tax', LHA rates and the benefit cap (Meers, 2015 forthcoming). The number of awards reached nearly 400 thousand in 2013/14 (Evans, 2014) with total expenditure across Great Britain in 2014/15 at £200 million (DWP, 2015). Scottish Government top ups to DHP budgets aim to mitigate as far as possible the controversial 'Bedroom Tax' north of the border (Wilson, 2015a). These payments have become an important means of enabling low income households affected by these reforms to remain in their accommodation and thus appear to playing an important role in preventing homelessness (Beatty, et al 2014; Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b)<sup>45</sup>. This has led to fears, however, regarding the impact of any further cuts to DHP budgets. Even in the absence of further cuts, DHPs are only able to offer time limited and discretionary help to a small minority of young people (Gallagher et al, 2012; Beatty et al, 2014). There is also some indication that working age adults may not apply for DHPs due to a perception that the elderly and those with children are the priority for these funds, albeit that given the localised nature of administration the actual prioritisation of particular groups (including young people) is not clear (Clarke et al, 2014).

In addition, several future welfare benefit changes are of substantial concern within the youth homelessness sector. First, the introduction of direct payment of HB to tenants (rather than

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<sup>45</sup> More than this, in legal challenges access to DHPs has been seen by the Courts as the lynchpin ensuring the legality of elements of the Coalition Government's welfare reforms (Meers, 2015).

landlords) under Universal Credit (UC) is widely recognised (including by young people themselves) as being particularly risky for young people, given their potential lack of budgeting skills and experience. It is feared that this may directly contribute to evictions and levels of homelessness for this group and other vulnerable households (YMCA England, 2012; EOC, 2014).

Second, and by far the greatest issue on the horizon among those in the sector is the planned removal of automatic entitlement to HB for out of work 18-21 year olds from April 2017. Following a number of announcements since 2012 regarding intended reforms in this area (Wilson, 2015b), the Summer 2015 budget confirmed current Government plans to remove automatic HB entitlement from out of work 18-21 year olds from April 2017 to “prevent young people slipping straight into a life on benefits... [and to] ensure young people in the benefits system face the same choices as young people who work and who may not be able to afford to leave home” (HM Treasury, 2015). The proposals have sparked alarm that such a move will lead to increases in youth homelessness (Centrepont et al, 2015; Robb, 2015; Scottish Housing News, 2015), a point echoed by key informants in this study:

*“I think that we will see a rise in youth homelessness. I think that we will see an increase in youth rough sleeping. I think we'll see a lot of pressure on families to keep their young people on beyond when they would previously would have done, which for some families will be the right thing to do but for some families will be very much the wrong thing to do and will put people in unsafe, unsuitable situations.”* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

The scale of such impacts are hard to predict in the absence of clarity over whether any kind of alternative funding arrangements will be put in place to fund supported accommodation for this group and/or which ‘vulnerable’ groups will be exempt. Youth homelessness charities are calling for young people who are pregnant or have dependent children, care leavers/formerly looked after children, those with a history of or who are currently homeless and those who are estranged from their parents to be excluded from these measures (YMCA England, 2015a; Kennedy, 2015). Initial modelling has urged caution on the extent to which this reform can contribute to the government aim of reducing public expenditure, in particular given the estimated economic impact on rent arrears and homelessness (Leishman and Young, 2015).

### **Welfare and youth support**

The Coalition Government also introduced substantial reforms to social security entitlements and other welfare provision, including localising (in England) and cutting funding (across Great Britain) for Council Tax support and introducing an overall benefit cap for out of work households below pensionable age, which has primarily effected larger families in London (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). Of particular relevance here are four further changes: the removal of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in England; the intensification of welfare benefit conditionality and growth in sanctioning; the localisation of the Social Fund; and declining investment in youth services.

EMA provided a payment of up to £30 per week to around 45% of 16-18 year olds in full time education to support with study-related costs and incentivise this age group to stay in education. Eligibility was defined in relation to household income. Described as “hugely expensive”, badly targeted and inefficient (Department for Education, 2011), the scheme

was abolished in England in 2011 and replaced with a bursary scheme tightly targeted at vulnerable young people<sup>46</sup>. Versions of the EMA scheme continue to be offered in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Though its removal in England was highly controversial, it appears to have only a small impact on participation rates among eligible young people (Lupton et al, 2015). Concerns have however been raised about the inadequacy of replacement bursaries in covering some learners' needs and a lack of awareness among young people about the bursary scheme (Callanan et al, 2014).

A key aim of the 2010-15 administration was to increase incentives to work (Lupton et al, 2015; IFS, 2013). UC specifically aims to improve the work incentives faced by young people (DWP, 2014), though there is doubt in some quarters regarding how effectively it will do so (Unison, 2014a). Also key to improving work incentives has been the intensification of benefit conditionality and the increased use of sanctions in cases where claimants are deemed not to have met the work related requirements attached to their receipt of Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (Watts et al, 2014). Under a new regime introduced in 2012 JSA claimants can now have benefit payments stopped in full for between 4 weeks and three years (depending on the seriousness and frequency of the 'offence'). A different sanctioning system operates under UC, which includes indefinite length sanctions for certain infractions that last until the claimant complies. Under JSA and UC regime, 16/17 year olds face more lenient sanctioning arrangements.

The sanctioning rate (sanctions as a percentage of JSA claimants) increased sharply after the mid-2000s. At that point rates stood at 2-2.5%, pulsing up to a peak of 3.5% in 2008, 5% in 2010-11, and now stands at around 6% (Watts et al, 2014; Webster, 2015). It has become increasingly clear that young people are disproportionately affected by such sanctions, with under 25 year olds facing a consistently higher sanctioning rate than older age groups (Watts et al, 2014; Beatty et al, 2015). In 2013/14, 18-24 year olds received 39% of sanctions (before reconsiderations and appeals) and the sanctioning rate for this age group was 9.6% per month, compared to 6.1% overall and 4.1% for 45-49 year olds. ESA sanctioning has also increased, albeit to a small extent and affecting smaller numbers (Webster, 2015) and these sanctions also disproportionately impact under 25s, though to a lesser degree than under JSA (Beatty et al, 2015). It is not yet clear why under 25s face higher risk of being sanctioned: suggested explanations include that they are more relaxed given the relative safety net offered by many young people's families; that they may live in more chaotic and insecure circumstances than older age groups and thus struggle more to meet the conditions of their claim; that they're less experienced in navigating the benefits system; and/or that they face discrimination within the welfare system (Watts et al, 2014).

Homeless young people are likely to face yet further disadvantages given growing evidence that those experiencing homeless – and vulnerable groups more generally – are also disproportionately affected by sanctions (Homeless Link, 2013e; Crisis et al, 2012; YMCA, 2014; Homeless Link, 2014d; Beatty et al, 2015). Freedom of Information requests also revealed that ESA sanctions overwhelmingly affect those with mental and behavioural disorders (Church Action on Poverty, 2015). Homeless people appear to be disproportionately impacted partly by virtue of sharing characteristics with groups most likely

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<sup>46</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund/overview>

to be sanctioned (more likely to be male and younger), but also due to the support needs and chaotic circumstances associated with homelessness that make compliance with benefit conditionality more challenging (Beatty et al, 2015).

Mirroring more general concern for households affected by benefit sanctions, youth homelessness services are reporting increasingly having to refer clients to food banks to meet their basic needs (YMCA, 2014). As a result, homelessness services are increasingly seeking to develop relationships with DWP and local Jobcentre Plus offices in a bid improve understandings of conditionality among services users and minimise exposure to sanctions<sup>47</sup>. In view of these concerns, from 2014, Jobcentre advisers have been able to exempt homeless claimants from work related requirements if they are in a domestic emergency and can demonstrate that they are actively seeking accommodation. It is not yet clear how effectively these provisions are mitigating negative impacts on homeless benefit claimants. The ramping up of conditionality targeted at young people looks set to continue under the Youth Obligation for out of work 18-21 year olds to be introduced in April 2017: higher conditionality from 'day one' of new claims will be combined with a requirement after six months to take up an apprenticeship, training or community work placement (HM Treasury, 2015).

A further change to the welfare safety net accessible to young people has been the localisation of the Social Fund in England and its replacement by national level funds in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. These new systems vary in whether they offer in kind support or financial help and whether they offer grants or loans. The safety nets offered by the funds in Wales and Scotland appear to be working relatively well (Sosenko et al, 2014; Blue Alumni Limited, 2015, though see EOC, 2014 for some remaining concerns about young people's access in Scotland), with some uncertainty about the shape of the new Discretionary Support scheme in Northern Ireland. There are significant concerns however regarding access to and the level of assistance under the scheme in England, in particular given cuts to the (un-ringfenced) local authority budget for Local Welfare Assistance Schemes. This is seen to particularly badly effect those who are homeless and/or trying to access new accommodation who reportedly find it increasingly difficult to access cash loans (e.g. to help furnish new tenancies or for rent in advance, for example) (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013; Homeless Link, 2014d). Centrepont (2014b) has highlighted the crucial role Local Welfare Assistance plays for young homeless people moving from periods of crisis to independent living, and has called for underspend of local authority budgets and declining funding for these schemes to be addressed.

A number of measures announced in the 2015 Summer Budget are also of note in considering the future prospects of young people, namely, the announcement that a new Youth Obligation will be introduced for 18 to 21 year olds on UC, which will require them to participate in an "intensive regime of support from day one of their benefit claim" (HM Treasury, 2015, p41) and after 6 months be expected to apply for an apprenticeship, traineeship, gain work experiences or be placed on a mandatory work placement. The announced new 'National Living Wage' (of £7.20 from April 2016) will not apply to those

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<sup>47</sup> See <http://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/working-together-toolkit-developing-relationships-with-jobcentre-plus#sthash.1fFbofPs.dpuf>

under 25 year old. Combined with the 4 year freeze on working age benefits<sup>48</sup>, these announcements exacerbate existing concerns about young people's ability to afford adequate accommodation (Graham, 2015).

These specific cuts to welfare entitlements and support should also be understood in the context of an overall decline in youth services due to significant spending cuts to relevant budgets (Hastings et al, 2015). The National Children's Bureau highlighted in 2012 that voluntary sector services for children and young people were likely to be affected by the cuts to Home Office/Ministry of Justice; Department for Education; and Department for Culture, Media and Sport budgets, and that the service impact was likely to be felt by youth offending teams, early childhood and youth services, and those providing cultural and sporting opportunities (NCB, 2012). Research based on 168 responses to Freedom of Information requests in 2014 confirmed that youth services had lost substantial funding and faced staffing cuts with the consequence that around 350 youth centres had closed, service places for 41,000 young people been lost and 35,000 hours of youth worker outreach been removed (Unison, 2014b). The Network of Regional Youth Work Units (2014) point to the resulting lack of a coherent national youth service and youth policy, with responses now localised and increasingly targeted on vulnerable groups rather young people more generally. Unison's report cautions that specialist provision (e.g. for Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people) is also being removed in some areas, with some local authorities discontinuing youth services completely (Unison, 2014b).

### Cumulative impacts

Several studies have sought to consider the cumulative impacts of this welfare reform programme. Beatty and Forthergill have published a series of reports detailing the overall impacts in England (2013a), Scotland (2015), Northern Ireland (2013b) and the Welsh Valleys (2014) and various cities/areas across the country (see also SSAC, 2014a). Key messages from their work include that:

- average losses per adult of working age are far higher in Northern Ireland and Wales than in England and Wales);
- incapacity and disability claimants are hit by multiple reforms simultaneously and families with children are particularly hard hit;
- old industrial towns (Glasgow and Belfast), the Welsh Valleys, and some seaside towns (Blackpool) and some London boroughs are particularly badly by the reforms, with much of the south and east of England (outside London) relatively lightly hit;
- more deprived areas tend to be hit more severely (see also Hastings et al, 2015) and welfare reforms will widen the gaps between the best and worst local/national economies across Britain.

The full impacts of welfare reform have not yet fully played out, not least given proposed large-scale future cuts. Most local authorities predict accelerating impacts over the next two years, though less in London, in part because the impacts to date have already been

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<sup>48</sup> This will apply to Jobseekers' Allowance; Employment and Support Allowance; Income Support; Child Benefit; applicable amounts for Housing Benefit; and Local Housing Allowance rates, though provision for high rent areas will be made and some other benefits are excluded from the freeze (see HM Treasury, 2015).

dramatic (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). The full effects are certainly yet to be seen in Northern Ireland given delays in passing relevant legislation in the jurisdiction.

## Key points

- Young homeless people now face a different 'offer' under homelessness policy in each of the four UK nations. Most notably, the abolition of the 'priority need' category in Scotland means that virtually all young people who are homeless are now entitled to settled housing.
- Elsewhere in the UK, only young homeless people deemed to be in 'priority need' are entitled to rehousing. Despite no recent expansions of priority need criteria, developments in case law may lead to a greater proportion of young people being considered 'vulnerable' and thus owed the rehousing duty.
- Responses to 16/17 year olds who are homeless appear to have improved following the 2009 Southwark Judgement. Extensions to corporate parenting duties owed to those in foster care in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and to all care leavers in Scotland aim to improve transitions to adulthood among these groups.
- 'Housing options' approaches are used in local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland to seek to prevent homelessness. There remain concerns that some young people may be excluded from help due to gatekeeping. New Welsh legislation requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for all eligible homeless households.
- The prevention of youth homelessness has been an ongoing focus in Scotland through the Equal Opportunities Committee inquiry and in England through the development of the Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway. It has garnered somewhat less attention in Wales and Northern Ireland.
- In England and Wales, local authorities can now discharge the statutory rehousing duty into the private rented sector without applicants' consent. Though this may help ease the pressure on social housing, there is concern regarding the rehousing of homeless households in insecure private rented accommodation.
- Despite efforts to minimise the use of B&B hotels as emergency accommodation for homeless young people, evidence suggests that this practice continues in some areas, including for 16/17 year olds in local authority care.
- The Coalition Government's period in office saw investment in England in a number of programmes focused on single homelessness, complex needs and rough sleeping, with the Platform for Life and Fair Chance funds specifically targeting youth homelessness. These small-scale, tightly targeted and time-limited funding streams will not compensate for cuts to housing related support, local authority budgets, youth provision and welfare and housing entitlements.
- The welfare reform programme initiated in 2010 has disproportionately affected young people. Restrictions on entitlement to Housing Benefit have constrained young people's ability to access the competitive private rented sector and appear also to be impacting on

their capacity to access social housing given landlords' increasing reluctance to house groups likely to struggle to pay their rent.

- Although the emphasis on improving work incentives for young people has been welcomed, there is growing concern about the low wage and insecure employment young people increasingly rely on, and on the disproportionate impact of benefit sanctions on young people and those experiencing homelessness.
- There are fears that the planned removal of automatic Housing Benefit entitlement for out of work 18-21 year olds will lead to increases in youth homelessness, with uncertainty remaining regarding which 'vulnerable' groups will be exempt from this measure and whether alternative funding arrangements for supported accommodation for this group will be put in place.





### 3. The scale of youth homelessness

This chapter reviews available evidence on the scale of and trends in youth homelessness in the UK. Establishing the scale of youth homelessness is extremely challenging for a number of reasons (Quilgars et al, 2008; Clarke et al, 2015). Importantly, definitions of both 'homelessness' and 'youth' vary; data collected is invariably service-based and thus may 'double count' young people coming into contact with multiple services; and service data inevitably fails to account for those who do not access services. Further to this, data sets that are available vary in scope – covering specific services, local areas/cities, UK jurisdictions or (rarely) the whole of Great Britain or the UK.

This chapter thus utilises the most useful sources of data on statutory homelessness, single/non-statutory homelessness, rough sleeping and 'hidden homelessness' to provide a 'lens' into the scale of youth homelessness in the UK. The accounts of key informant interviewees are used to contextualise available data and research evidence.

#### Statutory youth homelessness

As described in chapter 2, each of the four UK nations now operates a quite distinct statutory homelessness system, entitling different groups to different levels of assistance. As a result, statutory homelessness statistics now measure different phenomena across the four countries, with methods of recording and monitoring also differing, making direct comparisons regarding the *scale* of statutory youth homelessness extremely problematic. Statutory homelessness data does remain helpful in demonstrating trends in acceptances within each of the UK jurisdictions, though these trends reflect a collection of factors not just (or even primarily) trends in housing need, including most notably that each of the four jurisdictions are at various stages in the development and implementation of pro-active preventative approaches that seek to reduce the need for statutory homeless applications. All these factors must be borne in mind when interpreting measures of statutory youth homelessness discussed below.

Overall since 2008/09, the number of young statutory homeless acceptances in England has fallen by a third to 13,490, despite overall acceptances increasing (albeit marginally) over this time period. While youth acceptances continued to fall in the last year, overall acceptances are now increasing (see figure 2). As a result, the share of acceptances from young people has declined significantly, from 40% to 25%. It should be noted that the majority of these young homeless households are likely to be accepted because they include a pregnant woman or children, and thus the trends are of very limited use in understanding trends in single youth homelessness specifically. The numbers accepted as vulnerable due to young age (primarily 16/17 year olds and 18-20 year old care leavers) have also decrease dramatically to 1,300 with the proportion of acceptances for this reason down from 8% to 2%. This may reflect that fewer 16/17 year olds are accepted as homelessness (and more gain 'looked after' status) due to improvements in practice following the Southwark Judgement (see chapter 2).

**Figure 2 Statutory homelessness decisions and acceptances 2008-09 – 2014/15, England, by age**

| Year    | Total decisions | Total number of households accepted | Number of 16-24 year olds accepted | % of acceptances 16-24 years old | Number accepted as vulnerable due to young person | % acceptances vulnerable due to young person |
|---------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 2008/09 | 112,900         | 53,430                              | 21,620                             | 40%                              | 4,080   | 8%   |
| 2009/10 | 89,120          | 40,020                              | 15,510                             | 39%                              | 2,680   | 7%   |
| 2010/11 | 102,200         | 44,160                              | 16,000                             | 36%                              | 2,210   | 5%   |
| 2011/12 | 108,720         | 50,290                              | 17,380                             | 35%                              | 1,980   | 4%   |
| 2012/13 | 113,520         | 53,770                              | 16,820                             | 31%                              | 1,760   | 3%   |
| 2013/14 | 111,610         | 52,250                              | 14,380                             | 28%                              | 1,470   | 3%   |
| 2014/15 | 112,340         | 54,430                              | 13,490                             | 25%                              | 1,290   | 2%   |

Source: DCLG Tables 770, 773 and 781.

A number of factors are likely to explain these dramatic falls in statutory measures of youth homelessness. The trends may, in part, result from the targeting of prevention and relief activity at young households (through for instance, youth specific workers or services within housing departments). Current prevention statistics do not analyse actions by age, however<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, it may be that prevention work has a higher success rate among younger households, perhaps reflecting that their needs may be less complex or long-standing than is the case for older groups. It may also reflect the heavier disincentive young people face when they approach local authorities as homeless: options may include long stays in temporary accommodation that young people may deem undesirable and ultimately the discharge of duty into the PRS. A further potential contributing factor may be that young people are more likely than older groups to be deemed not homeless, not in priority need or intentionally homeless, though age breakdowns that would allow this to be tested are not possible within the statutory statistics. It may also be that young people are more easily dissuaded from making a homelessness application due to less awareness of their entitlements and/or less confidence in challenging initial local authority responses. Indeed, Centrepont have recently estimated that in England Wales, 22% of young people who approach their local authority for help are turned away with no practical help (Centrepont, 2015b).

The relative importance of each of these factors is not yet known, though it can be stated with some confidence – given trends in other measures of homelessness, key informant testimony and wider evidence on youth homelessness – that the falls in statutory youth homelessness are not entirely (or even primarily) explained by either an easing of the underlying drivers of homelessness or by declines in actual housing need among young people in England.

<sup>49</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/homelessness-prevention-and-relief-england-2014-to-2015>

In Scotland, statutory youth homelessness was relatively stable between 2008/09 and 2010/11, before falling by 43% between 2010/11 and 2014/15 and by 6% in the last year (see figure 3). That being said, there has been a growth in youth homelessness in 14 local authorities and an increase of over 10% in 6 areas<sup>50</sup> (Scottish Government, 2015c). Rates of youth homelessness vary substantially by local authority, from 7 to 30 per 1000 of the youth population and rates of over 15 per 1000 in 12 areas<sup>51</sup>. Young people make up 29% of statutory homeless households in 2014/15 compared to 36% in 2008/09.

These trends reflect the increasing emphasis on homelessness prevention seen since 2011, and the reasons for a steeper fall in youth compared to overall homelessness is potentially explained by a similar combination of factors as in England (aside from the impact of the Southwark Judgement, which does not apply in Scotland). It is interesting to note that the decline in youth homelessness since 2010/11 has been more gradual than in England, and that unlike south of the border, the proportion of homelessness accounted for by 16-24 year olds has stayed relatively stable in Scotland at around 30% since 2012/13. On this point, a key informant commented:

*"[Young people] are still making up the same proportion in our stats. Through the housing options work that we're doing there's quite a focus on young people... there's been quite a lot of effort being put into a whole variety of mediation services. So you might have expected that to have more of an impact than it probably has just now".*  
(Statutory sector key informant, Scotland)

**Figure 3 Statutory homelessness households 2008/09-2014/15, Scotland, by age**

| Year    | Number of applications assessed as homeless | Number of applications assessed as homeless, age 16-24 | % applications assessed as homeless, age 16-24 |
|---------|---|--|--|
| 2008/09 | 41,596                                      | 14,868   | 36   |
| 2009/10 | 43,371                                      | 15,503   | 36   |
| 2010/11 | 41,530                                      | 14,523   | 35   |
| 2011/12 | 35,387                                      | 12,141   | 34   |
| 2012/13 | 32,132                                      | 9,955  | 31   |
| 2013/14 | 30,093                                      | 8,798  | 29   |
| 2014/15 | 28,615                                      | 8,229  | 29   |

Source: Scottish Government Youth Homelessness Analysis 2014-15

In addition to statistics on the operation of the statutory homelessness system, Scotland has recently begun collecting statistics on local authority homelessness prevention activities, with the first set of experimental data released in 2015. Of the almost 60,000 approaches to local authorities for prevention activity in 2014/15, 26% of them were from 16-24 year olds (Scottish Government, 2015b). Going forward, this new data will offer a further means to monitor housing need in Scotland, including among young people. It will also offer further insight into the apparently diverse implementation of housing options services across

<sup>50</sup> Aberdeen City, Falkirk, Angus, Dundee City, Inverclyde and Eilean Siar.

<sup>51</sup> Angus, Dundee City, South Ayrshire, Scottish Borders, Eilean Siar, East Lothian, Shetland, Falkirk, Midlothian, West Lothian, Clackmannanshire, West Dunbartonshire

Scotland, and how these local authority services link with the formal homelessness system (Dore, 2015).

**Figure 4 Statutory homeless acceptances 2008/09-2014/15, Wales, by age and vulnerable young people**

| Year    | Number of acceptances | Number of acceptances 16-25 | % acceptances 16-24 | Priority due to vulnerable young person |
|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|---|
| 2008/09 | 5,865                 | 2,505                       | 43                  | 670                                     |
| 2009/10 | 5,565                 | 2,450                       | 44                  | 705                                     |
| 2010/11 | 6,255                 | 2,515                       | 40                  | 605                                     |
| 2011/12 | 6,515                 | 2,565                       | 39                  | 610                                     |
| 2012/13 | 5,795                 | 2,145                       | 37                  | 425                                     |
| 2013/14 | 5,115                 | 1,785                       | 35                  | 365                                     |
| 2014/15 | 5,070                 | 1,620                       | 32                  | 330                                     |

Source: StatsWales Homelessness data

In Wales, there has been a decline in the proportion of acceptances for 16-24 year olds from 44% in 2009/10 to 32% in 2014/15, and a 37% drop in the number of acceptances of 16-24 year olds (see figure 4). There has been an even more dramatic fall in the number of people accepted as in priority need due to vulnerability relating to young age: this has reduced by more than half since 2009/10.

Once again, the causes underpinning these trends are likely to centre on the impacts of the housing options approach on young people's experiences of the statutory support. It has also been suggested that the sizeable reduction in acceptances of young people may in part reflect the impacts of the 'Bedroom Tax' which may mean that parents/guardians are "less quick in throwing young people out because if they do they will be short... on their bedrooms" (Local Government representative, Wales). This consequence of the 'Bedroom Tax' has been noted elsewhere in the UK (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b), but may be particularly pertinent in Wales due to the policy's disproportionate impact in the jurisdiction (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c).

Northern Ireland has not seen the dramatic declines in (overall) statutory homelessness observed in the other UK nations, and instead has seen relative stability in decisions and acceptances since 2008/09. This reinforces the connection between the substantial declines in these measures seen elsewhere in the UK and the introduction of preventative 'housing options' approaches in these jurisdictions, but not (yet) in Northern Ireland. This is also evident in the much higher rate of (all age) statutory homelessness per 1000 of the population seen in Northern Ireland (13.4)<sup>52</sup>, compared to the other UK nations (Scotland 11.8, Wales 4.2 and England 2.3) (Fitzpatrick et al, 2014b)<sup>53</sup>. The comparatively high rate in

<sup>52</sup> The higher rate is also likely to reflect an administrative practice unique to Northern Ireland to process older people who require rehousing for health or social care reasons via the homelessness route (Fitzpatrick et al, 2014b)

<sup>53</sup> Note that these patterns of incidence are very different to those indicated by the PSE survey which measure self-reported past experiences of homelessness rather than statutory homelessness. This measure suggests that

Scotland is symptomatic of the jurisdictions expanded legal safety net, with the particularly low rate in England likely to reflect the early and enthusiastic adoption of the ‘housing options’ approach.

In relation to youth homelessness specifically, Northern Ireland did see a decline of 14% in *decisions* related to 16-24 year olds between 2011/12 and 2013/14. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, though it could reflect the impact of the Southwark Judgement in the jurisdiction. It should be noted that this decline in *decisions* may not reflect a decline in *acceptances* of young people as statutorily homeless (data on acceptances by age is not available). It should also be noted that these decisions relate only to single young people, not young couples/families, which are included in the statutory youth homelessness data available in the other UK nations.

**Figure 5 Households presenting as homeless 2010/11-2013/14, Northern Ireland, by age**

| Year    | Number of decisions | Number of acceptances | Number of decisions 16-24 | % decisions 16-24 |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 2008/09 | 18,076              | 8,934                 | --                        | --                |
| 2009/10 | 18,664              | 9,914                 | --                        | --                |
| 2010/11 | 20,158              | 10,443                | 4,381                     | 22                |
| 2011/12 | 19,737              | 9,021                 | 4,394                     | 22                |
| 2012/13 | 19,354              | 9,878                 | 4,189                     | 22                |
| 2013/14 | 18,862              | 9,649                 | 3,776                     | 20                |

Source: DSD Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2013-14 and data compiled for Fitzpatrick et al (2014b). Only includes singles, not young couples or families.

As noted in chapter 2, vulnerability relating to young age in and of itself is not sufficient to secure ‘priority status’ in Northern Ireland. In order to be able to access full duty entitlement, young people must demonstrate that they are at risk of financial or sexual exploitation. Data is not available regarding the number of young people classed as vulnerable for this reason, though service providers in Northern Ireland highlighted that it can be “really hard to prove” (Youth homelessness service provider, Northern Ireland ) at risk status, for instance in cases of parental violence or abuse when the only proof available is testimony from another family member.

## Non-statutory youth homelessness

A substantial number of young people experiencing homelessness are not represented in the statutory statistics described above, particularly outside of Scotland. Some of these non-statutory homeless young people nevertheless appear in the ‘decision’ or ‘presentation’ statistics collected by local authorities or in prevention data (see above), but others may never come into contact with statutory services or be recorded in official statistics. As a result, attention to statutory statistics alone is likely to substantially underestimate the true

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the highest rates of homelessness exist in England and Scotland, with lower rates in Northern Ireland (5.5%) and Wales (5%) (see above).

scale of youth homelessness. Service based data offer a crucial means of attempting to quantify the scale of non-statutory homelessness. Such efforts do not enable quantification of hidden homelessness, i.e. homelessness among those not in contact with local authorities or other homelessness services, however (see below).

In 2015, Clarke et al (2015) sought to estimate the total scale of youth homelessness in the UK by combining statutory data with an estimate of non-statutory youth homelessness based on hostel accommodation bed spaces, CORE data and 40 local authority case studies across the four UK nations. They concluded that 39,491 young people used homelessness services in the year to September 2014 across the UK, around half of whom were homeless at the start of that period, and half of whom became homeless during that period. In addition to this level of non-statutory homelessness – and with adjustments made to eliminate double-counting – a further 43,750 statutory homeless young people were identified<sup>54</sup>, indicating overall that 83,241 16-24 year olds experienced youth homelessness in the UK in the year to September 2014.

By way of comparison, Quilgars et al (2008) calculated that in 2006/07 there were 31,000 non-statutory young homeless people in Great Britain using Supporting People services (Northern Ireland data was not available). Combined with statutory data for the year (for the whole of the UK), social lettings data and available data on rough sleeping, this suggested an overall UK-wide figure of at least 75,000 young people experiencing homelessness in that year<sup>55</sup>. A further estimate – using similar methods but able to draw on improved data on youth rough sleeping – identified at least 32,900 non-statutory homeless young people that used housing support services in 2008/09. Drawing upon these data sources, the authors estimated that at least 78-80,000 young people experienced homelessness across the UK in 2008/09 (Quilgars et al, 2011).

The 2008 and 2011 estimates were based in part on Supporting People data that is no longer available and is thus not calculated in the same way as – and thus not directly comparable to – the more recent Clarke et al (2015) estimate. In light of this, and the margin of error inherent in making such estimates, the safest conclusion is that overall levels of youth homelessness have remained stable – and may even have increased slightly – over the last decade or so. This is particularly striking given the substantial declines in *statutory* youth homelessness and increased emphasis on homelessness prevention witnessed over the period.

In 2012, Clapham et al outlined likely scenarios facing young people in the housing market in 2020. Taking the 2008 youth homelessness estimate (Quilgars et al, 2008) as their starting point, they suggested that on the basis of trends and available information, a further 6,000 young people (their focus was 18-30 year olds) would experience a ‘chaotic housing pathway’ (Clapham et al, 2012). The key reasons given for such a projection were: increasing shortfalls between welfare benefits and rent levels; the persistence and potential worsening of family relationship breakdown and related evictions; less public funding directed at prevention and support; increasing reliance on the PRS and lower access to

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<sup>54</sup> The estimate thus includes both single young homeless people and young families accepted as statutorily homeless.

<sup>55</sup> This estimate combined supporting people data, CORE data on non-statutory young homeless households rehoused by housing associations and available data on youth rough sleeping.



social housing; reduced availability of tenancy sustainment support and thus a higher rate of failing tenancies. It might be anticipated that the incidence of chaotic housing pathways experienced by young people may be even greater than Clapham et al (2012) envisaged given the welfare changes announced in the 2015 budget which, if implemented, promise to create an even more challenging context for young people to 2020.

A number of other projects have sought or are seeking to cut across the data sources available to provide a more comprehensive picture of youth homelessness. First, Centrepont (a UK youth homelessness charity) is in the process of developing a Youth Homelessness Databank<sup>56</sup>. This digital open-data resource aims to collate national government, local authority, voluntary sector and housing provider data from across the UK in an attempt to better quantify and geographically map experiences of homelessness and the impacts of services.

Second, large-scale survey data offers a means of estimating the incidence of homelessness without relying on statutory or service level data. The UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey 2012 (PSE) for instance, provides data on the overall incidence of homelessness across the UK by asking participants in a general household survey about past experiences of homelessness. Across the UK, nearly 8.5% of adults say that they had experienced homeless at some point, with 2% saying this had happened in the last five years, and 1.5% sleeping rough or staying in temporary accommodation in that period. Rates ever experiencing homelessness are highest in England (9%) and Scotland (8%), with lower rates in Northern Ireland (5.5%) and Wales (5%). This survey data clearly indicates that experiences of homelessness are more common among 16-24 year olds than older age groups, with nearly 7.6% of this age group reporting recent experience of homelessness, over three times the rate for all ages (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). As yet unpublished analysis of large-scale household survey data in England and Scotland suggests however “that it is not... youth, per se, that leads to a higher likelihood of homelessness, but rather the disproportionate experience of poverty experienced by [this group]” that accounts for the strong apparent association between young age and homelessness (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, unpublished).

## Rough sleeping among young people

The most robust and comprehensive data source on young people sleeping rough is the CHAIN database<sup>57</sup>, which records the number of people seen ‘bedded down’ by outreach workers in London<sup>58</sup>. In 2014/15, a total of 871 18-25 year olds were seen rough sleeping in London, up 40% since 2011/12. This sharp recent increase in youth rough sleeping is broadly in line with rough sleeping trends among all age groups in London (up 34% since 2011/12<sup>59</sup>) – with young people consistently making up around 11-12% of London’s rough

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<sup>56</sup> See <http://centrepont.org.uk/databank>

<sup>57</sup> The figures recorded here are based on the authors’ own analysis of CHAIN data.

<sup>58</sup> Rough sleeping is monitored in England yearly via a mix of local authority snapshot counts and estimates. The latest release identified 2,414 rough sleepers (of all ages) across the country, 13% up on 2012 and 37% up on 2010. Over a quarter of the rough sleeping identified were in London and the level in the capital had increased 37%, compared to 7% outside of London between 2013 and 2014. These local authority estimates and counts do not breakdown the rough sleeping population by age. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2014>

<sup>59</sup> It has been suggested that the pace of this upward trend has in fact been moderated by NSNO interventions across England (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b).

sleeping population<sup>60</sup> – but has nevertheless caused significant concern among youth homelessness providers, who have described the trends as a ‘wake up call’ in light of government plans to restrict 18-21 year olds access to Housing Benefit (YMCA England, 2015b; Centrepont et al, 2015). More positively, the number of under 18 year olds seen sleeping rough in London is consistently very low at 0.1-0.2% of cases, with only 9 under 18s seen rough sleeping in the whole of 2014/15.

CHAIN data also indicates that young rough sleepers are overwhelmingly male, albeit that the proportion of young female rough sleepers (19%) is higher than for rough sleepers overall (14%). The profile of young rough sleepers in London is also distinct in terms of nationality: contrary to several key informants perceptions that most young rough sleepers are UK nationals, among the 18-25 group, only one third of rough sleepers in 2014/15 were from the UK originally (compared to 43% overall), with 50% being of Central or Eastern European origin (36% overall) and 16% being from elsewhere (20% overall). A total of one third of young rough sleepers recorded on CHAIN in 2014/15 (286) were from Romania. This pattern however may well differ outside of London.

CHAIN data also monitors how many times they have been observed sleeping rough during the current period and whether or not they have been seen sleeping rough in a previous period. Young rough sleepers tend to be seen sleeping rough less frequently than older rough sleepers and are less likely to have been seen rough sleeping in the previous year. In 2014/15, of the 18-25 year olds seen sleeping rough, 65% had been seen bedded down only once during the year, compared to 57% of rough sleepers overall. Only 12% of young people seen sleeping rough in 2014/15 had also been recorded as sleeping out in 2013/14, compared to 21% overall. Only 3.1% had been seen in a year prior to 2013/14 as well as in the most recent period, compared to 12% overall. This data is in line with key informant perspectives about the distinct nature of youth rough sleeping:

*“my sense is that of the young people who sleep rough, they don’t sleep rough for very long”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)

*“I do think that young people use their support networks, however spurious or varied they might be, to avoid rough sleeping per se, so I think it’s fair to say that they may be less prone to long-term rough sleeping, but I don’t think that necessarily means that they are not vulnerable just because they’re not presenting in street counts in the way that mature adults might”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

*“If young people have slept rough it tends to be young people on their first night of leaving home will sleep on a beach or in a park and that will be their one night out and then they’ll find a service the next day. We don’t find they’re in the city centre and places where you can easily find them and get help to them, but we do find they might even stay in their own community in a stairwell, but they’re much more likely to be on someone’s sofa.”* (Youth homelessness service manager, Scotland)

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<sup>60</sup> A recent evaluation of reconnection services (part of the NSNO model) indicate a similar proportion of targeted individuals (14%) were under 25 (Johnsen and Jones, 2015), with past evaluations of the NSNO programme identifying broadly similar proportions of young clients (15% and 20%) (Broadway et al, 2011 and NSNO, 2014).

Scotland is the only UK country to monitor rough sleeping through local authority statutory returns<sup>61</sup>. In 2014/15, 4% of statutory homeless applicants (1,409) reported sleeping rough the night before applying for assistance, with Glasgow and Aberdeen City (7% of applicants) and Aberdeenshire (6% of applications) standing out as hot spots and several local authorities<sup>62</sup> reporting no (or almost no) rough sleeping across the year. Overall, numbers reported rough sleeping are down by 57% since 2008/09 (and down slightly over the last year), but remain stable in some areas, notably, Glasgow (Scottish Government, 2015a). Unpublished data provided by the Scottish Government indicates an even greater fall in levels of rough sleeping amongst under 25 year old applicants: the number of young people reporting having slept rough the night prior to applying for assistance has fallen by two thirds since 2008/09 (from 891 to 312). It should be noted that this data excludes those sleeping rough but who don't approach a local authority for help, though data from Glasgow's 'Online Data Management' system suggests that as many as three quarters of the 560 individuals enumerated as having slept rough in 2013/14 were found to have made a local authority homelessness application (Glasgow Homelessness Network, 2014). Service level data from Edinburgh and Glasgow indicates that around 14% and 10% of clients recorded as rough sleeping over 2013/14 were under 25 (Harleigh-Bell, 2015), with unpublished statutory data indicating that a somewhat higher proportion of applicants reporting sleeping rough the night prior to applying for assistance are under 25 (22.1% in 2014/15). Due to data limitations in this area and concerns about rough sleeping in Scotland (including among young people) there have been calls to improve monitoring in this area, including through a comprehensive street count (Harleigh-Bell, 2014 and 2015).

National rough sleeper counts have been conducted in Wales in 2007, 2008 and (using a different methodology) 2014, and have identified 138, 124 and 83 rough sleepers in Wales respectively. No data on the age of rough sleepers in Wales is publically available. In all these counts, Cardiff had the greatest number of rough sleepers. A complementary exercise undertaken in late 2014 and based on a two week census in participating organisations identified 244 rough sleepers across Wales, and Wrexham and Caerphilly counted numbers equal to or higher than Cardiff.

There is very little data available regarding the scale of rough sleeping in Northern Ireland, though the Homelessness Strategy published in 2012 stated that:

*“fewer than 10 individuals rough sleep in Belfast on a given night, not including a number of foreign nationals who sleep rough on a regular basis. There are, however, up to 100 individuals who could sleep rough regularly if appropriate services were not provided”* (NIHE, 2012, p22).

A recent report (Clarke et al, 2015) sought to estimate the scale of youth rough sleeping across the UK. It did so by extrapolating the findings of a 2014 ComRes survey of a representative sample of 2,000 16-24 year olds<sup>63</sup> and concluded that 17% of those surveyed had slept rough within the last year, which would equate to 1.3 million for the UK population as a whole. They further estimated that 40,000 young people sleep rough each night. These

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<sup>61</sup> The last rough sleeper count was conducted in 2003.

<sup>62</sup> North Lanarkshire (<1%), Falkirk, South Lanarkshire, West Lothian (all 0%).

<sup>63</sup> See [http://www.comres.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Centrepoint\\_Hidden\\_Homelessness\\_Poll.pdf](http://www.comres.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Centrepoint_Hidden_Homelessness_Poll.pdf)

results should be interpreted with caution. First, as the authors acknowledge (Clarke et al, 2015, p29):

*“the definition of rough sleeping is... a broad one that includes not just those sleeping on the streets and in parks, but also those who have slept in cars or tents because they had nowhere else to stay.”*

On a narrowed definition that includes only those who “were outdoors and open to the elements... [including] those who had slept on the streets, in a car park or in a park or other open space” (p30), this method suggests that 10% of young people (over 700,000) slept rough in the last year. Second, these estimates are based on self-reporting of these experiences rather than observation or service records and this is in contrast to the observational ‘count’ methods usually used to measure rough sleeping.

Third, three alternative estimates suggest a much lower levels of rough sleeping in England, Scotland and across the whole of the UK respectively. An estimate of overall (all age) rough sleeping in England that used a combination of survey results and administrative datasets<sup>64</sup> suggested that in 2010/11, between 4,000 and 8,000 people slept rough on a typical night (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). This compared to an official estimate for the period of around 2,000 (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). Analysis of the Scottish Household Survey (2003-2012 pooled samples) – a particularly robust data in this area – estimated that 8,700 people aged 16-24 in Scotland were homeless over a typical year (50,000 people of all ages). About 860 young people (5,000 people of all ages) slept rough over a typical year, with 115 (660) sleeping rough on a typical night<sup>65</sup>. Comparable typical night figures would be nearly 900 for staying with friends/relatives and 600 for staying in temporary accommodation. For UK as a whole, the PSE 2012 survey suggests that around 212,000 adults report experiencing homelessness per year, of whom about two-thirds (140,000) report having slept rough or used other forms of temporary/emergency accommodation. For adults aged 16-24 the risks were about three times greater than for all adults, implying annual numbers for homeless experience of 90,000, or for rough sleeping/other temporary accommodation of around 60,000<sup>66</sup>. The Clarke et al (2015) figures are difficult to reconcile with these alternative lower estimates.

## Hidden homeless

As noted above, some young people will not come into contact with local authority homelessness departments or other homelessness organisations, but may nevertheless lack secure, safe and adequate accommodation. This ‘hidden’ group includes those living in overcrowded conditions, squatting, ‘sofa-surfing’ around friends’ or relatives’ houses,

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<sup>64</sup> The specific sources were (1) the Multiple Exclusion Homelessness survey of 450 people who had used ‘low threshold’ services in seven UK cities (2) a study based on a three national, and relatively comprehensive, administrative datasets focused on people experiencing ‘Severe and Multiple Disadvantage’, including homelessness (3) data from the Supporting People client record system (4) the UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey.

<sup>65</sup> This analysis is drawn from unpublished work by Professor Glen Bramley, Heriot-Watt University associated with the Crisis Homelessness Monitors programme, see <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html>

<sup>66</sup> Large-scale household surveys are the best method of estimating *past* rather than *current* experience of homelessness, because such surveys do not generally capture people living in temporary or crisis accommodation or those sleeping rough. There are some very considerable benefits of using such surveys, not least the opportunity to generate robust, nationally representative results (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, unpublished).

involuntarily sharing with other households, and sleeping rough in hidden locations<sup>67</sup>. There is a longstanding concern surrounding young people's experiences of hidden homelessness, albeit that identifying, quantifying and monitoring trends in this subpopulation is by its nature extremely difficult (see NPI, 2003; Quilgars et al, 2008, Reeve and Batty, 2011; Clapham et al, 2014). Given the particular challenges of quantifying this aspect of youth homelessness, this section reviews available qualitative evidence on hidden homelessness, before highlighting the best available indicators of trends and scale.

A particular concern about younger age cohorts is that they spend periods 'sofa-surfing' before and/or instead of accessing homelessness services (Quilgars et al, 2008; Robinson and Coward, 2003; Pleace et al, 2008; Reeve and Batty, 2011). Though the terminology of 'sofa-surfing' is widely used and understood to indicate staying with friends and/or relatives when unable to stay in the family home, Reeve and Batty (2011) argue it "the term does not accurately depict, nor fully capture the range of ways in which homeless people rely on accommodation provided by other people. The experience of 'sofa-surfing' is more wide ranging and nuanced." (p28). Their study (of hidden homeless in general) described people exchanging services (cleaning, caring, translation, errands) for accommodation; house sitting; insecure/ambiguous tenancies; staying with acquaintances; squatting; staying in hotels, tents, camper vans etc.

In a report focussing on the experiences of under 18 year olds, Coram (2014, p5) concur that the term is often used as "a euphemism for a range of unsafe sleeping environments" including sleeping in tents or cars, in police cells or on night buses, in drugs dens or with strangers. Key informants in this study echoed the wide range of circumstances young people can find themselves living in:

*"we've had young people sneaking other young people into hostels or B&B's. We've had young people sleeping on older people's floors or hanging out with the street drinkers until somebody offers them a place to stay, so the young people sleeping with strangers, a lot of survival sex so finding a relationship that will offer them a place to stay and a bit of a mix of everything"* (Youth homelessness service manager, Scotland)

*"young people are particularly likely to be sofa-surfing, bouncing between granny and auntie and neighbour's floor and shed and bush and then back into granny's again"* (Voluntary sector key informant, Scotland)

Existing research indicates that young people's experiences of hidden homelessness vary substantially. For some, sofa-surfing at friends' and families' houses and other informal arrangements can be a positive experience, offering a safe and comfortable environment in which they can get 'back on their feet' and a means to avoid formal homelessness accommodation that may be perceived with fear or concern (Robinson and Coward, 2003; Clarke et al, 2015). For others, however, the experience is deeply problematic, with restrictions on their capacity to stay in the accommodation during the day, limited privacy, the insecurity that the arrangement may end suddenly, the financial expectations of the 'host' often combined with an inability to claim Housing Benefit (and the risk of financial exploitation) (Reeve and Batty, 2011). Those in such situations in addition report difficulties

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<sup>67</sup> Though it should be noted that in London, outreach teams seek out rough sleepers in hidden, as well as more readily visible, locations.

sustaining employment, due to their chaotic living circumstances and a sense of stigma at having to rely on others help without being able to reciprocate. For some, and especially for young and/or vulnerable people, these living situations have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing and safety, either due to physical living conditions (e.g. damp or unhygienic) or exposure to the risk of sexual exploitation and/or physical abuse (Reeve and Batty, 2011; Coram, 2014). Little is known about the balance of experiences among those 'sofa-surfing' and this was identified by key informant interviewees as a key evidence gap in knowledge around youth homelessness:

*"we don't know... enough about what's happening to hidden homelessness amongst young people... I think that sofa-surfing is both good and bad... that there are potential protective features and there are potential risk features... sometimes sofa-surfing is seen as a social evil, and sometimes it's just a better outcome than going into the institutional side"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

Two recent estimates seek to offer some indication of the potential scale of hidden homelessness. A 2011 survey of day centres for homeless people in 11 towns and cities in England (overall sample size 437) found that 62% of respondents were hidden homeless on the day they were surveyed and 92% had experienced hidden homelessness (Reeve and Batty, 2011). Of those who were hidden homeless at the time, 29% were aged 21-30. Less than 1% were younger than 20 years of age. The study also suggested that for every month individuals spent in formal homelessness provision, they had spent around 3 times as long in various 'hidden homeless' situations.

Clarke et al (2015) more recently sought to estimate levels of sofa-surfing using a survey of 2000 young people across the UK (see above). The results suggest that a third of young people have experienced sofa-surfing at some point, with 20% having done so in the last year. This would equate to 1.5 million young people experiencing sofa-surfing in the last year in the UK, with the authors further estimating that over 200,000 young people sofa-surf on any given night. These high estimates should be interpreted with caution, however, in particular when set against large-scale survey evidence suggesting a much lower prevalence of experiences of homelessness among young people. According to analysis of the UK-wide PSE survey, 7.6% of 16-24 year olds report experiencing homelessness in the last 5 years (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013), and 60,000 experience sleeping rough or forms of temporary accommodation that they regard as tantamount to homelessness per year. Analysis of the Scottish Household Survey (see above) suggests that around 4% of young people report ever experiencing homelessness, with less than 2.7% of the sample reporting such an experience in the last two years (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, unpublished). These data imply that 3,800 young Scots experience homelessness in the form of being obliged to stay with friends and relatives, while 3,300 use temporary accommodation, per year.

The disjuncture between these estimates may reflect that some of the young people reporting having sofa-surfed in Clarke et al (2015) study may not have considered their situation one of homelessness. Indeed, a closer look at the results reveals substantial variations in the experiences of sofa-surfing young people. For instance, 23% of young people who reported sofa-surfing did so for a week or less, with those reporting leaving a negative home environment/that their parents were no longer willing to accommodate them sofa-surfing for the shortest length of time. Much longer durations sofa-surfing were reported by young people who had been evicted for rent arrears, left prison, suffered domestic

violence from a partner or been evicted due to anti-social behaviour. Moreover, of the young people who had sofa-surfed in the last year, high proportions reported that the experience had had a fairly or very positive impact on their life across seven domains<sup>68</sup>. For instance, 48% reported that it had had a fairly or very positive impact on their physical health (compared to 45% who reported it having a very or fairly negative impact in this regard). Even more strikingly, 60% reported that it had a positive impact on relationships, compared to 36% who reported a negative impact. These differences within the group of young people identified as sofa-surfers suggest a need to better understand the prevalence and experiences of young people whose sofa-surfing is detrimental to their wellbeing and life chances, and to distinguish this group from those experiencing a temporary relationship breakdown with their families that is quickly resolved.

Beyond these attempts to quantify the scale of (aspects) hidden homelessness, large-scale survey data offers a means to track shifts in various indicators of hidden homelessness across the four UK nations, namely headship rates and levels of overcrowding. Household 'headship' rates describe the propensity of individuals within given age groups to form ('head') separate households. Fitzpatrick et al (2015b, 2015c, 2012b and 2014b) use the Labour Force Survey to analyse trends in household formation among younger age groups across the UK, finding that headship rates have fallen since 2010 in England, Scotland and Wales<sup>69</sup>, and most dramatically in the tight housing markets of the South East and London. This is consistent with a picture of a tight housing market and also of worsening real income/living standards among younger working age people in this period (Gordon et al, 2013). Fitzpatrick et al (2015b) also identify increasing levels overcrowding (across all age groups) in England, with Clarke et al (2015) identifying upwards trends in overcrowding across Great Britain for 16-24 year olds. Agreeing with the trends identified by this collection of indicators one key informant commented:

*"overall they're [local authorities] saying there's not an increase, by and large [in statutory youth homelessness]. But whether there are young people informally knocking on the door or ringing up and asking for help, I think the picture is really, we just don't know. But I think there's quite a lot of sofa-surfing and young people making informal temporary arrangements"* (Voluntary sector representative, England).

The extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate upper age limit from age 25 to 35, cuts to Housing Benefit, freezes to working age benefits and the removal of automatic entitlement to Housing Benefit from 18-21 year olds may all exacerbate these trends going forward.

## Key points

- Establishing the overall number of young people experiencing homelessness across the UK is extremely challenging given data limitations and the 'hidden' nature of some manifestations of youth homelessness.

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<sup>68</sup> These domains were: education, work, relationships, well-being, physical health, finding housing and finances. See Clarke et al (2015, p38).

<sup>69</sup> Trends of headship rates in Northern Ireland have been more positive (Fitzpatrick et al, 2014b). The authors suggest that this may reflect some combination of general housing market and economic improvement following the peace agreement; fluctuations in the housing market in Ireland (North and South) in the late 2000s; and increased availability of private rental lettings.



- Statutory youth homelessness has declined dramatically in England, Scotland and Wales since 2008/09 and at a faster rate than falls seen in overall statutory homelessness. This is likely to reflect the implementation of 'housing options' preventative approaches in these jurisdictions, rather than an easing of the drivers of youth homelessness.
- According to the most recent estimate, at least 83,000 young people were in touch with homelessness services across the UK in 2013/14. This and previous estimates suggest that the dramatic falls in statutory youth homelessness have been offset by concurrent rises in non-statutory homelessness, with overall youth homelessness remaining stable, and perhaps even increasing slightly over the last decade.
- Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey data indicates that 7.6% of young people in the UK have experienced homelessness in the last five years, three times the rate for the overall population. This association between young age and homelessness appears to reflect the disproportionate experience of poverty among young people, rather than their youth, per se.
- The number of young people sleeping rough in London has increased by 40% since 2011/12. Although broadly in line with overall rough sleeping trends, this sharp increase has caused significant concern in the youth homelessness sector, particularly in light of further planned cuts to the welfare and housing benefit entitlements of young people.
- Survey-based estimates of youth rough sleeping have generated dramatically varying estimates, with one estimate suggesting that over 700,000 young people slept rough over the last year in the UK. Analysis of the PSE survey suggests that 140,000 people of all ages report having slept rough or used other forms of temporary/emergency accommodation per year, with around two thirds of these (90,000) likely to be 16-24 year olds.
- There has been longstanding concern that many young people experience 'hidden homelessness'. This can involve 'sofa-surfing' with friends or family, or having to sleep in unsafe situations that put them at risk of physical harm, sexual abuse and other negative experiences.
- Increasing levels of overcrowding among young people across Great Britain and declining rates of household formation among 20-29 year olds indicate that levels of hidden homelessness may be rising. According to a recent estimate, as many as 20% of young people have sofa-surfed in the last year, though this high figure is difficult to reconcile with lower estimates from alternative and highly robust sources.

## 4. Youth homelessness in the UK: causes, profile and support needs

This section draws on available research and evidence, and key informant testimony to consider the causes of youth homelessness, as well as the profile and support needs of young homeless people and how this profile has changed in recent years.

### Causes of youth homelessness

Explanations of homelessness have tended to focus on either 'individual' or 'structural' factors. 'Individualist' perspectives see ill health, substance dependencies and dysfunctional family backgrounds as primarily explaining homelessness and such accounts dominated in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s. 'Structural' accounts came to dominate in the 1980s and these emphasised the role of housing shortages, poverty and unemployment. These structural explanations came under pressure in the 1990s when it became clear that single homeless people – and in particular rough sleepers (whose numbers had been growing) invariably had high health and social support needs. Consequently, explanations of the causes of homelessness began to combine individual and structural explanations, but with a continued emphasis on the underlying central importance of structural factors.

It has more recently been suggested that though the structural/individual dichotomy is a useful starting point in thinking about the causation of homelessness, the reality is far more complex (Fitzpatrick et al, 2005; Fitzpatrick et al, 2009). One current perspective proposes that four inter-related levels of causes - economic, housing, interpersonal and individual – work together to cause homelessness, with the balance of causes varying over time, place and for different groups. As a result, the structural economic and housing market context may be important for some particular groups experiencing homelessness, with personal factors playing a more minor role, whereas for other groups in other contexts, interpersonal and individual factors may be more important (Fitzpatrick et al, 2009). Empirical research on the experiences of particular groups of homeless people appear to support this approach: of particular relevance here, high levels of youth homelessness in the late 1980s appear to be best explained by the context of high youth unemployment and social security cuts (Fitzpatrick et al, 2009). On the other hand, research into homelessness among older people suggests that personal experiences such as bereavement may be an important explanatory factor (Crane et al, 2005) and a survey of homeless families in the late 2000s indicated that this was primarily a problem of housing market pressure and affordability, with individual support needs playing a stronger role in the case of single, street and young homeless people (Pleace et al, 2008).

International comparative evidence indicates that housing market factors have a direct impact on levels of homelessness in a particular country, with labour market changes having a more lagged and diffuse effect, particularly in contexts (like the UK) where the 'link' between unemployment, income and housing are strongly mediated by welfare provision (out of work benefits and housing allowances) (Stephens et al, 2010). It is in this context that efforts to monitor the impact of the post-2007 economic recession and post-2010 welfare reforms on homelessness have highlighted the impact of reforms to the welfare and housing safety-net on homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). It should also be noted that structural factors such as poverty, unemployment and a lack of affordable housing are likely to lead to increases in individual support needs and vulnerabilities, and to put a strain on social relationships (with family and friends) that often act to 'buffer' people from experiences of

homelessness when under financial strain (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). It is in this context that the empirical data on the immediate ‘triggers’ of homelessness among young people now reviewed should be understood.

Relationship breakdown has historically been and continues to be a primary cause of homelessness across the UK. In Scotland, 29% of applicants cited a ‘dispute within the households’ and 25% ‘being asked to leave’ as the main reason for applying as homeless in 2014/15, the most common causes by some margin (Scottish Government, 2015a). During 2013/14, 19% of all homelessness presentations in Northern Ireland were the result of a sharing breakdown or family dispute, the highest single reason for presentations in the jurisdiction<sup>70</sup>. In Wales, living with parents, relatives or friends and being asked to leave such accommodation, was the immediate reason for homelessness in 22% of those accepted as homeless in 2014/15, the second most frequent reason (excluding ‘other’) next to the loss of (social or private) rental accommodation (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015c). Relationship breakdown is also a primary trigger of statutory homelessness (among all ages) in England: relatives/friends no longer being able/willing to accommodate was cited as the main reason for homelessness by 26% of those accepted as statutorily homeless (all ages) in 2014/15. This was the *most* common reason given up until 2014/15 when acceptances resulting from the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy overtook as the primary cause (accounting for 29% of acceptances). This represents a significant change in the triggers for homelessness in England, with the ending of such tenancies accounting for only 13% of acceptances in 2008/09<sup>71</sup>.

Available data suggests that relationship breakdown is an even more central factor in triggering homelessness among young people. Though reasons for homelessness are not broken down by age in statutory statistics across the rest of the UK, in Scotland in 2014/15, 39% of 16-24 year olds accepted as homeless cited being asked to leave as the immediate reason for their homelessness (compared to 25% among all age groups), with a further 28% of young people citing a dispute within the household as the immediate reason (Scottish Government, 2015c). The 2014 Homeless Link youth homelessness survey (covering providers and local authorities in England) found that 36% of young people at responding providers/local authorities were homeless as parents/caregivers were no longer able or willing to accommodate them, with a further 24% no longer able to stay with other relatives or friends (Homeless Link, 2014d).

Key informants participating in this study believed there had been little change in the immediate triggers of youth homelessness over time:

*“Fundamentally the fact that young people going through adolescence with families, and particularly families who may already have challenges or be under pressure or whether there are parenting issues... those pressures sort of come to a head around this time and it's push or pull. And that's still the case... that the main reason is family and relationship conflict, breakdown, you know, families no longer willing or able. So they still remain the high level issues.”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England)

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<sup>70</sup> Calculated from DSD Northern Ireland Housing Statistics, table 3.8.

<sup>71</sup> Calculated from DCLG statutory homelessness live tables, table 774.

The importance of the immediate trigger of family conflict forcing young people to leave the family home does not necessarily reveal the full story of the causes of youth homelessness and how they are changing, however. It was noted that family conflict can be the result of individual problems and support needs (e.g. substance misuse), interpersonal difficulties (e.g. in 'blended families', abusive relationships) or manifestations of childhood trauma. Further to this, stress within families may also be caused by 'structural' factors, for instance housing/labour market and welfare changes. In this regard, key informants suggested that the balance of underlying causes may be shifting, with increasing financial difficulties within families (linked primarily to welfare reform, see chapter 2) now seen to play a key role in causing family conflict and youth homelessness:

*"[relationship breakdown] remains the main story, although maybe the financial pressures that families are under at this time as opposed to maybe ten years ago are more of an influencing factor... there's a sense that because of the financial pressures that a lot of the families are under... the pressure that puts on families, in terms of arguments and emotions and resilience to cope with difficulty increases."* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland).

*"if [parents/carers] use our adult advice services, the advisers are having to put themselves in a really difficult situation, saying, 'Well, you know, if you can't encourage your child to either claim benefit or to look for work or training, then you're going to have to have a difficult conversation with them about leaving home.' Because invariably these parents are coming to see us about debt problems that are caused because they're not able to meet the shortfall in rent. The other side of it is young people who are coming to see us and say, 'I feel pressurised by my parents, who are telling me I've got to go out and find work or I've got to leave home, because they can't afford to keep me anymore,' or, 'My parents are moving into smaller accommodation... so I've got nowhere to live,' or, 'They're leaving the borough,' as well, because we're getting lots of families who are leaving London now... because obviously it's difficult to survive in London if you're on benefits... And that has an impact on young people as well."* (Voluntary sector advice service manager, England)

Another key informant described how general socio-structural shifts (in education and the labour market) have created a context in which certain groups of young people are at greater risk of homelessness:

*"you go on to higher education and... there is a whole integrated pathway there, brilliant, halls of residence, shared flats, grotty house, you know, and then you move on. But if you don't go on to higher education there is no such pathway. And fundamentally that's the problem. We do not think about it. We expect them to stay at home until they earn enough to look after themselves... And of course because the employment situation is so different now that housing route has changed dramatically for youth."* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England)

These comments regarding a shift towards 'structural' factors in the causation of youth homelessness chime with the findings of other recent research. A 2014 survey of local authorities, housing associations and homelessness organisations in the North East pointed to parents no longer being willing to accommodate young people as the primary cause of youth homelessness in the region, but added that this "was linked to changes to the benefits

system, violence/abuse, overcrowding and general financial difficulties. These causes of homelessness appear more prevalent in this year's research, compared to previous years" (YHNE, 2014, p4). The 2014 Homeless Link survey similarly suggested that the "structural factors that contribute to youth homelessness may be increasing" (p23), with providers indicating the a much greater proportion of the youth homelessness they deal with resulted from financial problems due to benefits reductions than was the case in 2013. Overcrowding and rent or mortgage arrears also appeared to be playing a bigger role than in 2013 (Homeless Link, 2014d).

## Profile

This section draws on available evidence regarding the key characteristics of young people who experience homelessness in the UK, focusing on the themes of socio-economic background, age, gender, ethnicity, household type and nationality/migration status. It then considers a number of further 'risk factors' associated with youth homelessness.

### Socio-economic background

The UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey 2012 (PSE) reinforced previous evidence that increased risk of homelessness is associated with socio-economic disadvantage of various kinds, such as being a lone parent, living in material deprivation and living in a deprived neighbourhood (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). There is also evidence that some Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups are at higher risk of homelessness, reflecting the increased risks of socio-economic disadvantage amongst these groups (Quilgars et al, 2008). Quilgars et al (2008) further concluded that the vast majority of young homeless people are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, as noted above, recent analysis of survey data in England and Scotland suggests that the strong association between young age and homelessness is explained by the disproportionate experience of poverty among young people, rather than their youth, per se (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, unpublished).

Despite some media speculation that the recession might lead to greater levels of 'middle class homelessness' – and occasional reports that people from well-heeled backgrounds are accessing homelessness services – evidence and stakeholder views overwhelmingly confirm the view that homelessness still tends to be experienced by the poorest sections of society (Johnsen and Watts, 2014; Fitzpatrick et al, 2012a). As one key informant noted:

*"as ever, the key factor in whether a young person becomes homeless is around financial inequalities and financial deprivation and it's usually - I think if some groups are over represented it's often a sign of an underlying inequality within those groups in terms of the financial capabilities of their parents... the majority of young people who go through homelessness ultimately are under privileged"* (Local Government representative, Wales)

### Age

Statutory homeless data in England does not distinguish between age bands within the 16-24 year old group, though table 2 suggest that the proportion of 16/17 year olds and 18-20 year old care leavers (i.e. those accepted as vulnerable due to young age) has fallen faster over the last decade than the number of young homeless people overall. 16/17 year olds acceptances are recorded separately in Scotland and Wales, and statutory statistics in these jurisdictions also indicate a sharper fall in 16/17 year old youth homelessness than youth

homelessness overall<sup>72</sup>. Trends in these three jurisdictions would thus indicate a shift towards a slightly older cohort of young statutorily homeless people since 2008/09. In Northern Ireland, the proportion of young single people presenting as homeless who are aged 16-17 has stayed stable at around 9% over the last 5 years<sup>73</sup>.

Key informants differed in their perspectives on whether younger (16/17) or older (18-25) young people were in greatest housing need at present. Several key informants who manage voluntary sector homelessness organisations commented that they are seeing a shift *downwards* in the age profile of their services users i.e. that they are accommodating more 16/17 year olds. It was felt however that this may be the result of local authorities prioritising 'priority need' groups at the expense of non-priority 'older' young homeless people, reflecting the impact of the Southwark judgement, stricter block purchasing contracts with local authorities and constrained budgets<sup>74</sup>:

*"the profile of the young people has changed at [our services] over the last eight years or so, maybe a bit shorter. What we've found is that young people coming to us are younger so they're more likely to be 16 to 19... I think in the last five years I'd say it's mainly been cuts to local authority funding and changes in commissioning priorities which have impacted on the age profile of young people in our services. Providers who have experienced cuts in SP [Supporting People funding] have felt unable to provide appropriate accommodation and support for younger people particularly 16/17 year olds. As a result of these factors, we have taken a much higher proportion of the younger age group."* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)

*"Of course because local authorities have got more of a duty on 16-18 year olds than they have on over 18s that immediately led to a spike in the number of 16-18 year olds [when service become a local authority contractor]. That was then exacerbated by the Southwark Judgement"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide).

Commenting on trends in the profile of overall youth homelessness, another national stakeholder, observed that "there are fewer 16, 17-year olds" and pointed instead to the unmet needs of older young homeless people, both related to local authorities' focus on their statutory obligations and the restriction of young homelessness services to under 21s rather than under 25s:

*"there is this gap. There always has been this gap for the 18s and over where there's no statutory duty owing... there is [also] a potential gap around the 21 to 25-year olds because localism is localism. The ring fence is off SP [Supporting People]; you can do what you like. I think a lot of authorities are now just focusing on under 21s in terms of youth rather than under 25s. It is a bit of a concern of mine of watch this space because there are still some very, very vulnerable 21 to 25-year olds who haven't yet got sorted and need services. They're still young and... they're in adult homelessness services. I do wonder about that in terms of the impact on them long-term"* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

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<sup>72</sup> Calculated from Scottish Government (2015c) and <https://stats.wales.gov.uk>

<sup>73</sup> Calculated from DSD Northern Ireland Housing Statistics, table 3.9.

<sup>74</sup> It is not clear why a similar trend has not occurred in Northern Ireland.

The concern regarding 18-21 year olds is clearly particularly pertinent following the 2015 budget announcement that this age group will no longer ‘automatically’ qualify for Housing Benefit (see chapter 2).

## Gender

Statutory data in Wales and Scotland distinguishes young people accepted as owed the main homelessness duty by gender. In Wales, two thirds of acceptances by 16-24 year olds were from female-headed households in 2014/15, compared to 53% in 2014/15 in Scotland. The higher proportion of young homeless females in Wales likely reflects the continued operation of priority need categories that prioritise pregnant women and lone parent families (the majority of which are female headed households) in the jurisdiction, in contrast to Scotland where all unintentionally homeless households are entitled to the rehousing duty. In Scotland, *single* females account for 30% of statutory youth homeless households, single males for 40%, female headed lone parent families 16% and male single parents 2% (Scottish Government, 2015c)<sup>75</sup>.

Equivalent data is not available for England and Northern Ireland, though – as in Wales – women are likely to be over-represented among acceptances given the operation of priority need categories in these jurisdictions (see also Quilgars et al, 2008). For instance, in England, 47% of acceptances (all ages) in 2014/15 were of female-headed lone parent households, with a further 10% of acceptances single females<sup>76</sup>. Overall, women appear more likely to be accepted as statutorily homeless than men.

The picture for non-statutory homelessness appears to be the reverse, with the Homeless Link SNAP survey (of support for single homeless people in England) suggesting that 70% of service users in accommodation projects and 82% of day centre users are men (Homeless Link, 2015b). Men also dominate the rough sleeping population: of those seen bedding down in London in 2014/15, only 14% were women, though the rate was slightly higher (19%) among young rough sleepers. Analysis of the Scottish Household Survey, which asks a representative sample of Scottish residents about past experience of various forms of homelessness, confirms that experiences of rough sleeping are overwhelmingly reported by men (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, unpublished). Interestingly, the data suggests that all other forms of homelessness<sup>77</sup> are experienced by both genders at similar rates.

Previous research has indicated that women’s pathways through homelessness are distinct from those of men, with the causes of homelessness among women, help seeking behaviours of women and responses of service providers all seeming to differ by gender (Cramer and Carter, 2001; Cramer, 2005). In particular, domestic violence and sexual exploitation, though not only affecting women, play a particularly important role in women’s pathways into homelessness (Jones, 1999; May et al, 2007). Gendered patterns detrimentally impacting young men were identified by one key informant:

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<sup>75</sup> Young couples account for 6% of the group and young families the remaining 4% (figures are rounded so do not add up to 100%).

<sup>76</sup> See DCLG statutory homelessness live tables, table 780.

<sup>77</sup> Ever experienced homelessness; experienced homelessness in the last two years; stayed with friends or relatives because they didn’t have anywhere else to live in the last two years; stayed in emergency or temporary accommodation (e.g. hostel, refuge, B&B) in the last two years; applied to their local authority because homeless/threatened with homelessness.



*“there tend to be more young men who are still homeless, at risk of homelessness at a slightly older young person age; 20, 21, 22. When you start to look at their profiles they are looking like the next generation of severe multiple exclusion”* (Voluntary sector representative, England).

## Ethnicity

According to survey data measuring past experiences of homelessness, people of mixed and Black ethnicity appear to face a greater risk of homelessness than other ethnic groups (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). A 2005 investigation identified that minority ethnic people were three times more likely to become statutorily homeless than the majority White population and that this pattern was maintained across all English regions (Gervais and Rehman, 2005). Current statutory homelessness statistics in England suggest an ongoing (and potentially worsening) over-representation of BME groups among those who are homeless, with 16% of households accepted as homeless in 2014/15 being of Black ethnicity, up from 12% in 2008/09 and compared to 3.3% of the general population<sup>78</sup>. The Homeless Link SNAP survey also identified a relatively high proportion of BME people in homeless accommodation projects (25%) and among day centre users (16%) (Homeless Link, 2015b). Though this ethnic patterning is likely much more significant in England than in other UK jurisdictions (Quilgars et al, 2008), there are some signs that this may be changing to some degree, with the proportion of statutory acceptances in Wales accounted for by non-White groups having increased from 4% to 9% since 2006/07<sup>79</sup>. In Scotland, there appears to be less change in this regard (Scottish Government, 2015a). Though there is little research exploring the incidence of homelessness among young people from minority ethnic groups in the UK, a 2008 survey of young statutorily homeless households indicated that 18% of homeless 16-17 year olds, and 15% of 16-24 year old heads of homeless families, were from a minority ethnic group (Pleace et al, 2008).

Though in general minority ethnic groups are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness, some groups (namely Asian households) appear to be at lower risk (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). Key informants participating in this study commented on these differing dynamics, noting for instance that though the ethnic background of young service users by and large mirrors local demographics, this is not the case in areas with a high Asian population. It was felt that Asian families tend to live in multi-generational households (see also Gervais and Rehman, 2005 and Fitzpatrick et al, 2013) and appear less likely to ask young people to leave the family home than other ethnic groups (both British and non-British).

There is very little recent evidence of the impact of ethnicity on people's experiences of homelessness (including young people), though it seems likely that at least some of the greater risk they face of becoming homeless is accounted for by the relative socio-economic disadvantage of BME groups relative to non-minority groups. For instance, BME households are more likely to be living in poverty and the youth unemployment rate among black 16-24 year olds was 32% in 2013/14 compared to 16% among White young people (Dar and Mirza-Davies, 2015; Kahn, 2015). Certain ethnic group-specific risk factors have been identified, with family conflict related to forced marriages in South Asian households linked to

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<sup>78</sup> General population figures taken from the Census 2011 and cover England and Wales, whereas the statutory data covers England only.

<sup>79</sup> See <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/Acceptances-and-Other-Decisions/eligiblehouseholds-by-ethnicity-year>

homelessness among young people (and in particular LGBT young people) from these families (Gervais and Rehman, 2005; Taneja, 2010).

### Household type

The best data on the household composition of young homeless households is available from the Scottish statutory statistics (Scottish Government, 2015c). These indicate that of statutory homeless youth (aged 16-24) in 2014/15: 40% were single males; 30% single females; 16% female single parents; 6% young couples; 4% young families; 2% male single parents, with relative stability in these figures since 2007/08. This suggests that the majority of young people coming through the statutory homeless system are single, albeit with significant minorities of lone parent households also clearly represented.

Comparable data on household type by age is not available in the other UK jurisdictions, with the consequence that it is hard to distinguish between single young people accepted as in priority need due a specific vulnerability and young people who are accepted due to being pregnant/having a child in the household. Given the different responses needed by and available to these two groups, this gap in the data is problematic. The abolition of the priority need criterion in Scotland means that the household composition of young people experiencing statutory homelessness in the jurisdiction cannot be extrapolated to other areas of the UK, where the proportion of single households considered to be in priority need will be much lower. In the UK in 2014/15, for instance, less than 10% of statutory homeless 16-24 year olds were deemed to be in priority need due to their young age<sup>80</sup>, with the vast majority of the remaining 90% vulnerable due to the household including a child or pregnant woman. One key informant emphasised the point: “very few [young people accepted as homeless] will be single ... Ask any housing options officer and they will say most under 25s who are accepted are pregnant or young parents” (Voluntary sector representative, England). It was acknowledged however, that the recent Supreme Court judgement may lead to more single young people being given priority in the future.

Statutory homelessness data on household types in Northern Ireland is only available in relation to those presenting as homeless, not in relation to acceptances. Furthermore, available data only distinguishes between those who are young singles and couples/families (of all ages). In 2013/14, 12% of all those who presented were 16-25 year old single males, 8% young single females. Data is not available on how many young couples or families presented. Overall, 53% of presentations were from single households of all ages, with 16-25 year olds making up 37% of all single households presenting in 2013/14<sup>81</sup>.

### Nationality and migration status

Little data is available on the nationality and migration status of young homeless people specifically, though there are grounds for thinking that some vulnerable migrants face a high risk of homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al, 2012a). This is particularly the case for those who face restrictions on their right to work and/or restricted access to welfare assistance (including Housing Benefit). Homeless Link (2014a) highlight a gap in provision for young homeless people with no access to public funds, echoing a wider concern about the destitution migrants with no recourse to public funds face regardless of age (Fitzpatrick et al,

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<sup>80</sup> That is, because they are 16/17 year olds or 18-20 year old care leavers, see figure 2 in chapter 3.

<sup>81</sup> Calculated from DSD Northern Ireland Housing Statistics, table 3.9.

2015a). That being said, some foreign nationals are eligible for welfare assistance, including under statutory homelessness legislation and in the first quarter of 2015 17.9% of acceptances in England were foreign nationals, with 3.5% being A10 nationals<sup>82</sup>.

The key source of data on the nationality of young people sleeping rough in London is the CHAIN database. Of the 18-25 year olds rough sleeping in 2014/15, one third were UK nationals (compared to 43% overall), with 50% being of Central or Eastern European origin (36% overall) and 16% being from elsewhere (20% overall). A third of young rough sleepers in 2014/15 (286) were from Romania<sup>83</sup>. This very high proportion of migrants recorded among the young rough sleeping population was contrary to several key informants' expectations that most young rough sleepers are UK nationals. It is also in tension with previous evidence that older migrants in their late 30s and 40s (usually low skilled with limited English) are most likely to find themselves on the streets (Homeless Link, 2006; Garapich, 2008, see also Fitzpatrick et al, 2012a). It should be borne in mind however, that CHAIN data covers London only where the proportion of rough sleepers from outside the UK is likely to be particularly high, with UK born rough sleepers likely to predominate in other parts of the country.

It should also be noted that there has been a shift in the proportion of UK versus non-UK nationals in the young rough sleeper population in recent years: in 2011/12, 44% of 18-25 year old rough sleepers were UK nationals and 29% were Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants, with only 8% of young rough sleepers coming from Romania. The growth in young CEE (and particularly Romanian) rough sleepers since 2011/12 is likely to reflect a combination of the ending of transitional restrictions on the on CEE A2 (Bulgaria and Romania) migrants in 2013 and increasing restrictions on the welfare entitlements of EEA migrants (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2015a).

### **Risk factors associated with youth homelessness**

Beyond these demographic patterns and the clear association between homelessness and socio-economic disadvantage, young people with particular experiences have long been understood to be at higher risk of becoming homeless. Evidence on such 'risk factors' is invaluable in informing preventative interventions and offers insights into the 'red flags' organisations working with young people can use to identify those at risk before more severe problems (including homelessness) develop (St Basils, 2015).

**Care leavers** have long been identified as a key group at high risk of experiencing youth homelessness, due to the likelihood that these young people have had difficult experiences in early life (see below), combined with the difficulties they face making the transition from the care system into independence (Pleace et al, 2008; Quilgars et al, 2008; Homeless Link, 2014d; NAO, 2015). Evidence also suggests that care leavers are more likely to experience multiple exclusion, complex needs and severe disadvantage in later life (Fitzpatrick et al, 2012a; Bramley et al, 2015). Though there appear to have been some improvements in responses to care leavers<sup>84</sup> through improved national strategy, local joint working and

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<sup>82</sup> See DCLG statutory homelessness live tables, table 786.

<sup>83</sup> Authors' own analysis of CHAIN data.

<sup>84</sup> Also relevant here is the recently (September 2015) published 'care leavers accommodation and support framework' developed by St Basils and Barnardo's. See [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/Put-care-leavers-in-the-driving-seat-so-they-can-choose-their-housing/press\\_releases.htm?ref=108907](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/Put-care-leavers-in-the-driving-seat-so-they-can-choose-their-housing/press_releases.htm?ref=108907).

extended corporate parenting duties across the UK (see chapters 2 and 5), a recent National Audit Office report notes that the numbers of young people leaving care are rising due to increases in the care population as a whole; an increase in the number of older children coming into care; and 16- and 17-year-olds presenting as homeless and becoming looked-after (NAO, 2015). The report therefore calls for improved monitoring of the lives of care leavers over time (including their experiences of unemployment, homelessness, mental illness or criminal activity) as well as improved support for care leavers (see also HM Government, 2013; House of Commons Education Committee, 2014).

Like care leavers, **young offenders** have long been understood to be at high risk of homelessness (Quilgars et al, 2008; Homeless Link, 2014d; Glover and Clewett, 2011) and more complex problems later in life (Fitzpatrick et al, 2012a; Bramley et al, 2015). Moreover the links between housing instability/homelessness and reoffending/recidivism are well evidenced (Williams et al, 2012; Ministry of Justice, 2013). There seems to have been somewhat less attention paid to the development of interventions reducing the risk of homelessness faced by young offenders in comparison to care leavers<sup>85</sup>. A recent study of resettlement provision clearly shows that many prisoners (including those who are under 25) leave custody with limited/inadequate accommodation in place (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation, & Ofsted, 2014), chiming with findings from a 2011 Barnardo's study exploring young people's experiences of leaving custody in England (Glover and Clewett, 2011). For those aged 18 and over, local authority statutory homeless duties apply only to vulnerable ex-offenders (including now in Wales where all ex-offenders used to have 'priority need' status) and as Wilson (2014) notes, the Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities greater discretion over who to prioritise in the allocation of social housing, potentially making this sector harder to access for those with an offending history. More positively, reforms which came into force in April 2015 seek to reduce reoffending rates through post-sentence supervision of short-sentenced prisoners and the development of a nationwide 'through the prison gate' resettlement service; these may pay dividends in this area (DCLG, 2015; HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation, & Ofsted, 2014).

It is also clear that young people who have experienced a wide range of difficult experiences during their lives are at greater risk of homelessness than those that have not. This includes experiences of **abuse and neglect, domestic abuse/violence** within the family home, **mental health issues** and/or **substance abuse** in the family home (Pleace et al, 2008; Quilgars et al, 2008; St Basils, 2015; see also Fitzpatrick et al, 2012a; Bramley et al, 2015). For instance, a recent study of homeless young people in Wales concluded that this group were seven times more likely to have experienced emotional abuse and three times more likely to have experienced neglect than young people in general. The study further suggested that almost 60% of young homeless people surveyed had witnessed a family member being abused (Llamau, 2015). Given the rootedness of these factors within families, it has been suggested that young people with older siblings who have experienced homelessness can be considered an additional high risk group (St Basils, 2015). There are also well established links between **running away** from home and future homelessness (Malloch and Burgess 2011; Shelter Scotland, 2011; Morton et al, 2014; Bramley et al,

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<sup>85</sup> Though St Basils is now planning to develop a version of the Pathway tailored to young people involved in the criminal justice system.

2015), with clear links also established between running away and sexual abuse/exploitation (both as a risk to those who have runaway and as a cause of running away in the first place) (Berelowitz et al, 2012; Hill et al, 2014; Thompson, 2014).

As well as disruptive experiences in the family home, poor experiences in education have also been linked to a higher risk of homelessness. **Truancing, exclusion or suspension** from school as well as receiving **no/low levels of qualifications** and having **learning difficulties or learning disabilities** are now seen as ‘critical early warning signals’ that children may experience other forms of deprivation, including homelessness, in later life (Quilgars et al, 2008; Bramley et al, 2015; St Basils, 2015). According to Llamau (2015), 55% of young homeless people using their services had been suspended from school at least once, and clients were twice as likely to have left school with no qualifications than young people in general.

**Lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender young people** are another group who are over-represented in the youth homeless populations, in part because of these young peoples’ higher risk of experiencing parental rejection, together with familial physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and/or violence (AKT, 2015). LGBT youth are also understood to be more vulnerable when experiencing homelessness to violence and discrimination, substance abuse and mental health problems, sexual exploitation, and risky sexual behaviour than their non-LGBT peers (AKT, 2015). These concerns are particularly acute in relation to transgender young people (McBride, 2013). LGBT organisations report little progress in developing better responses to the needs of this group over the past decade, with specialist provision under threat in the current financial climate; monitoring and reporting on their experiences inadequate; and the statutory homelessness framework and housing providers not deemed to sufficiently recognise the specific needs of this group (Unison, 2014b; AKT, 2015).

## Support needs

This section considers the support needs of young people experiencing homelessness in the UK, focusing in particular on young people with complex needs; mental health problems and substance misuse issues.

### Complex and multiple needs

Key informants consistently commented that the proportion of young people accessing services with complex needs (mental health issues, offending, substance misuse etc.) is increasing. Homeless Link’s 2014 ‘Young and Homeless’ survey found that 63% of providers were unable to assist some young people because their needs were seen to be too high, with a further 51% unable to assist due to the risk the young person was deemed to present to others (Homeless Link, 2014d). Young people were seen to have a greater *variety* of co-occurring needs than in the past and/or having issues that have developed to a relatively advanced stage (see also Centrepoin, 2010; Homeless Link, 2014d; Harding et al, 2015; Llamau, 2015):

*“I think the shift we are seeing across the general population that we’re supporting in supported accommodation is that young people are coming presenting multiple and complex problems at a more advanced stage, so the consequence of that is that where supported accommodation would previously have been easy to provide at a low*

*level support, it's now much more challenging"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

*"the level of need that has increased significantly over recent years. We have seen, particularly over the last kind of five years, an increase in the number of young people coming through [our] services who have either kind of very high level needs around mental health or they have multiple issues, multiple and complex difficulties... We're seeing an increase in the number of young people who come through [our] services who are, if you like, fundamentally unable to look after themselves, whether that means unable to eat healthily, unable to remain physically active, unable to stay emotionally stable and look after their wellbeing sufficiently in order to think about things like education, training and employment."* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

Young people presenting at homelessness services with (sometimes undiagnosed) learning difficulties/disabilities (ranging from dyslexia to autism) was also seen to be an emerging trend:

*"We're seeing more and more young people with mental health issues... We're seeing more young people with learning needs... When we did our own sort of mini-research, ... the majority of our young people who presented as homeless had some sort of learning or behavioural need as well. I think that's a big change."* (Voluntary sector advice service manager, England)

*"more and more we see young people with undiagnosed learning difficulties and people on the kind of autistic spectrum, but quite often having not in school had a diagnosis and, therefore, having had no support for that, and it's much harder once they reach 16 or indeed 18 to get any support for that".* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)

Related to these trends, one key informant commented that the more complex profile of the youth homelessness population impacts on their prospects of finding work and maintaining a secure income, in particular in the context of welfare reform and the increasing focus on behavioural conditionality:

*"people appear to be much further from the employment market than they used to be in youth homelessness, and that has ramifications... we don't have Universal Credit here yet, but sanctions are already quite high. I've got a big fear of Universal Credit coming in and what sanctions will be, and it's because of the ability of (a) of people to be able to emotionally regulate and (b) to actually follow and understand what's expected of them to be able to have a claim going, and to be able to get into the employment market."* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)

Various explanations of this observed shift towards more complex needs in the youth homeless population were proposed by key informants. First, it was suggested that the shift might be indicative of the sector's improved awareness of the range of needs young people can present to homelessness services with. On this view, the change is seen to reflect greater 'attunement' and 'sensitisation' to these issues, rather than any 'real' shift in the profile of the population:

*"I think we're probably better at identifying support needs. Whether that means they weren't there before, I wouldn't say that necessarily that was the case. But potentially we are better at identifying those support needs".* (Local Government representative, Wales)

Second, some participants saw the shift as the result of changes in how youth homelessness services are targeted and delivered, again suggesting that it may not reflect a change in the support needs of young homeless people per se, but rather in responses to young people accessing services. There were two relevant changes to service delivery that were seen as relevant: on the one hand, key informants noted that youth homelessness services are now more strictly targeted at young people with higher/more complex needs:

*"The general narrative is that a young person needs to be in an absolute crisis before they can receive support currently"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

*"nowadays all access to our housing type services.. is controlled by local authorities... there is very clear turning people away who they don't perceive to have a support need"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)

On the other, and positively, it was suggested that improvements in local authority homelessness prevention may mean that those with lower needs and/or whose families are able to continue supporting them are less likely to end up accessing formal youth homelessness services:

*"it's not that [overall] young people have got necessarily more extreme issues or complexity. The sorts of issues are not different from what we saw, say 10 years ago, it's just that a higher proportion of young people coming into the system of homeless have got complex needs, multiple needs... there is a better understanding amongst professionals and young people - but it's nowhere near at the level it could be - around affordability of accommodation and actually leaving home at a young age is difficult... I think prevention work is better... particularly 16-17 year olds and care leavers, in many authorities better joint prevention work to try and support young people to stay at home or plan a move"* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

If homelessness among those with lower/less complex needs is more effectively prevented, the proportion of those who do become homeless and have complex needs would be expected to increase.

A third, and more concerning, explanation was offered by some key informants, who felt that the increase in the complexity of young homeless people's needs reflected the reduction in generic youth homelessness provision (e.g. youth clubs and youth worker teams) prompted by local authority budget cuts (see chapter 2). This trend was seen to have drastically reduced opportunities to support young people before (and in order to prevent) crisis. As a result, young people access homelessness services later than in the past and with a greater range of and/or further progressed/more serious issues:

*"the driver is generalised youth and support services have closed systematically over the last five years... whether they're youth outreach services, youth centres, youth clubs, education programmes in schools... what we're seeing is the impact of those*



*services not picking up on young people earlier, not being able to provide for young people alternatives to crisis and, therefore, crisis having a longer duration before they are picked up” (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)*

Budget cuts were also seen to have impacted on the availability of services/support to help resolve young people’s needs once they are homeless, potentially meaning that homelessness is harder to resolve and lasts for a longer duration:

*“we’ve... seen a kind of rolling back of services that are there to support young people in coping with [their support needs]. So you’ve got this kind of double whammy of increasing levels of need amongst young people whilst the services that are out there to support those young people are disappearing or at the very least are kind of increasingly difficult to access” (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide).*

*“the welfare economy means that the budget allowable is still very much pushing towards low support” (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)*

Problems accessing appropriate mental health support were emphasised particularly strongly, as discussed in the next section.

Understanding the accuracy and relative importance of these different explanations is beyond the scope of this study. It should be noted however that there is some tension between the more positive explanations – that emphasise sensitisation to various support needs in the sector, improvements in prevention, and better targeting of services to those in greatest need – and more negative explanations that highlight the impact of budget cuts on access to generic youth services as well as sources of specialist support.

### **Mental health needs**

In addition to an overall trend towards more complex needs among young homeless people, the prevalence of mental health issues among this group was a particularly strong theme:

*“it seems as though the complexity of need... is increasing. Mental health is a huge, huge challenge... At any one time between 80 and 100% of the young people that our service is working with have diagnosed or in the process of being diagnosed mental health difficulties.” (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)*

*“increasingly there’s a higher proportion of young people who have got a range of mental health problems and behavioural issues, ADHD, autism” (Voluntary sector representative, England)*

*“mental health is always highlighted as a big area of concern I think that is still fair to say” (Voluntary sector representative, England)*

This echoes wider research establishing a substantially higher prevalence of mental health issues among young homeless people than among young people overall. Preece et al (2008) found that one third of respondents to their survey (n=350) of 16/17 year olds accepted as homeless in England reported having a current mental health problem, with over half having past experience of depression, anxiety or other mental health problems. In a 2012 survey of

16-24 year olds accessing services from one youth homelessness provider (n=127), 27% reported having a diagnosed mental health need or condition (compared to 6% of the control group) (Depaul UK, 2012). Hodgson et al (2014) undertook a full psychiatric assessment of 90 young people with experiences of homelessness in Wales, finding that 88% currently had a psychiatric disorder (compared to 32% of the general population) and over 70% met the criteria for two or more psychiatric conditions (compared to 12% of the general population). Only 31% of the young people involved in the study had accessed a mental health service in the last 6 months however.

Recent analysis of the 2010 and 2012 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Panel Survey clearly establishes the social determinants of mental ill health, finding that young people who are not in education, employment or training or who are socially isolated are twice as likely as others to report mental illness: those who have experienced 'everyday' social welfare problems (e.g. related to debt, benefits, housing or employment) are five times more likely to report mental health problems, with mental health problems deteriorating as such problems emerge (Pleasence et al, 2015).

Key informants in this study emphasised the "lack of mental health provision that is specifically targeted at younger people" (Voluntary sector representative, England) and particular problems around the accessibility of child and adolescent mental health services, combined with the difficulties faced when young people seek to transition between youth and adult provision:

*"The CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service] service is hard to access. It's different around the country, but there are long waiting lists. As ever, there's this problem about when you switch from CAMHS to adult mental health services, there's like a gap at the transition point and despite that having been identified multiple times, in multiple fora, that is not, there's currently no response to that."* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

*"psychological wellbeing, undiagnosed – or... diagnosed mental health [issues]... that's a big factor in people's lives; maybe they're self-harming, their abuse of themselves, their self-esteem, that is a big area that maybe not enough attention is given to. Or young people getting access to those services is not very good. There would be the whole issue between child and adolescent mental health services, the transition into adult services... That's a big gap"* (Statutory sector key informant, Northern Ireland)

*"we've had several incidents over the last few years where managers have kind of sat with people in extreme crisis until the early hours of the morning, from early afternoon, waiting for there to be an intervention and nobody holding that mental health issue at all... access to CAMHS services is very poor"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)

In response to high mental health needs and an insufficient access to mental health services (which some linked to strained local authority budgets), key informants reported the reorientation of homelessness services to cater for these issues, in part because doing so is seen as essential in enabling young people to move on:

*“when local authorities are strapped for funding, things like... psychological assessments for young people don't happen. And then you have a young person who's 16 and we're expecting them to enter the job market, and they haven't got the skills, because they couldn't engage in what it was to become employed, or in education or training. So we're having to do lots of back-to-basics work with young people to enable them to become sort of fully thriving adults”* (Voluntary sector advice service manager, England)

There was a sense among those working in the sector that “working in a psychologically-informed way is critical” (Voluntary sector representative, England) and that services had little choice but to adapt to meet these support needs:

*“We actually have to have a more skilled workforce. You know, some people talk about the race to the bottom and the downward trend in terms of employing staff... paying less than the living wage and taking staff comparatively fresh out of college who don't have appropriate qualifications or experience, but we are saying that's not the way that we can work and do our work effectively”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

This contributor emphasised the challenge of up-skilling the work force and at the same time as services are facing funding cuts.

### Substance misuse

The proportion of 16-24 year olds in England and Wales who have taken illicit substances in the last year has been on a long-term decline since the late 1990s, though appears to have stabilised at around 19% since 2011/12 (Home Office, 2015). The number of 18-25 year olds in treatment is also declining (PHE, 2014a). Moreover, younger people tend to seek treatment for different kinds of substance misuse issues (e.g. cannabis use) than older people seeking help, and tend to recover well from these problems in treatment (PHE, 2014a). Their experiences are in contrast to the growing number of over 40s in the treatment population, for whom heroin and crack use is more common and who tend to have more entrenched problems (PHE, 2014a).

In line with this documented trend, key informants reported a dramatic shift in the substance misuse of young homeless people over the longer term:

*“from our experience there is a massive shift... going back to what was the data of the Rough Sleepers Initiative we managed emergency accommodation for under 25s. It was a 20 bed hostel and the minimum number of chaotic Class A drug users at that time was 17 out of 20, and drug misuse of Class A to that stage has all but disappeared in youth homelessness.”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England).

*“it comes and goes in waves. So there was a spike of Class A misuse in the latter part of the last decade, 2008-2010. That was then replaced by a sharp increase in alcohol misuse, which then faded away. The big concern amongst practitioners currently is the so-called legal highs and the prevalence and the ease with which young people seem able to get hold of is something that [we] are dealing with on a daily basis.”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

*“So 15 years ago, 20 years ago, 10 years, what we were all seeing was very different. There are lots of different trends in terms of substances that young people are using. There was a point where heroin use was massive in some cities and big towns and that's not the case anymore. But use of very strong cannabis and legal highs are particularly of concern, I know, to a lot of provider organisations.”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

According to Homeless Link (2014a) 26% of homeless young people in touch with local authorities/providers who took part in their annual survey have an illegal substance misuse issue, with a further 13% misusing alcohol. The overwhelming concern among key informants participating in this study was the increased use of New Psychoactive Substance (NPS) or so called ‘legal highs’ among young people. NPS have been defined as:

*“psychoactive drugs, newly available in the UK, which are not prohibited by the United Nations Drug Conventions but which may pose a public health threat comparable to that posed by substances listed in these conventions. The key features are that NPS are psychoactive, i.e.... stimulate or depress the central nervous system, or cause a state of dependence; have a comparable level of potential harm to internationally controlled drugs; and are newly available, rather than newly invented”* (The New Psychoactive Substances Review Expert Panel, 2014)

The nature of NPS is understood to have changed rapidly as new drugs come onto the market, but they include nitrous oxide (‘laughing gas’), GBL/GHB (which have sedative effects), BZP (a chemical compound that mimics the effects of ecstasy), salvia (‘herbal ecstasy’), mephedrone, 2-DPMP (‘ivory wave’) and some synthetic cannabinoids (‘spice’). Many of these substances though legally available when first introduced are now controlled/classified (PHE, 2014b). The use of mephadrone has declined from 2010/11 (when it was only slightly less common than ecstasy) having come under legislative control. Use of nitrous oxide and salvia increased in 2013/14, with usage of both around three times higher among 16-24 year olds than among the general population (Burton et al, 2014).

Available data suggests that the scale of NPS among the general population use is low compared to other substances (PHE, 2015), with Homeless Link (2014a) reporting that around 8% of young homeless people use legal highs. Many key informants were however greatly concern regarding the prevalence of legal high usage among young homeless people:

*“It is big on the agenda, and increasingly so actually... agencies have been struggling to know how to respond because it's all quite, well I think the volume of it is quite new to them. They've sort of been overwhelmed a bit within the last six to 12 months about how much of it is coming up, and how best to support young people”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

*“there is a complete flooding of the market of different types of what are classed as legal high, and actually the access to that is pretty easy because you can buy all those kinds of things on the internet and there are shops that are selling them on the streets”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)

Key informants from across the four UK nations saw ‘legal highs’ as a significant and recent challenge for the homelessness sector, but there was also some suggestion from a number

national stakeholders of geographic variations in legal high use, with the North of England reportedly particularly hard hit compared to London where illegal 'harder' drugs and cannabis are seen to dominate to a greater extent:

*"Legal highs are a big issue for us in the North, so, Yorkshire and the North East, not so much in London. The biggest issue for us in London is cannabis, skunk in particular"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)

*"there are some geographical variances... in the North East there is a significant problem associated with legal highs, readily accessible, not likely to lead to a legal sanction so young people are more likely to do it... particularly outside of London is that it's common to find cannabis paraphernalia shops on the high street... and very often they will also sell the legal highs... I think in London the drug industry, both legal highs and illegal highs, is much more controlled by much heavier weight criminal gangs... so I think there is something about the nature of criminality and criminal behaviour across the regions. ...I think those places are much more prone to higher, more illegal drugs, higher grade, again heroin and so on."* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

Indeed, it was striking that while a service provider in a Northern city commented that the vast majority of young people considered by the local authority risk management group use legal highs (reportedly "the biggest change this year"), a London key informant commented that:

*"I haven't seen much of that... that would probably have an impact if it's going on in the community, I'm sure, and I'm sure we'll see the effects of that coming through in the future, but we haven't necessarily just seen an influx of young people who are coming to see us, you know, who are using legal highs."* (Voluntary sector advice service manager, England)

There is also some suggestion from other investigations into NPS use that (unlike overall substance misuse prevalence, Burton et al, 2014) it is more prevalent in rural areas (PHE 2014b), possibly reflecting the ease of online purchase of NPS (EMCDDA, 2014).

There was also wide consensus that responding to legal high usage is a major challenge from providers of supported accommodation, due to their relative ease of access, low cost, and psychological and behavioural impacts:

*"The new substances are quite, in some areas of Scotland it's quite a profound change in how young people are presenting, and some of the problems they are very much acute problems in that... you don't know what the effects are going to be, you don't know what the chemical composition is going to be and people are mixing the drugs. It can cause temporary psychosis, and so people are doing things and they have no idea what they are doing and they are then having to deal with the consequences of that. Also people are having longer term effects because they are easily accessible and cheap. People are taking them more frequently than they might."* (Statutory sector key informant, Scotland)

*"we're struggling with...issues to do with legal highs, drugs and alcohol and some high-risk behaviours around self-harming... and consequences of drugs around psychotic*

*behaviours and issues around criminality and antisocial behaviour... What it was seen to be is that it's maybe actual quality of the legal highs; it's maybe the uncertainty about what is in legal highs. But it also seems to be the impact on young people's behaviour coming off legal highs as opposed to physical reaction and the psychotic behaviours. Then there's a reluctance of young people to agree to even medical attention and the concerns that staff are left with in terms of how do you basically manage these young people?"* (Statutory sector key informant, Northern Ireland)

*"the challenges for legal highs are is that they're highly addictive. There are more episodes of psychosis and stuff, more impact on young people's mental health, paranoia, aggression."* (Youth homelessness service provider, Northern Ireland)

It was also clear that regular usage of 'legal highs' is a barrier to moving on from homelessness for young people:

*"when a young person is selling their bedding and their pots and pans in order to pay for legal highs then it's really hard to ever get to the stage where they're turning up for meetings or they're able to sit down and concentrate on reading a bill or application for a job... young people have always used alcohol and it tends to have been a Friday night get-together with other friends, but with legal highs we've had single young people using on their own or smaller groups of young people using lots and it's every night, because it's quite cheap and readily available... So they definitely remain in a homeless or an unstable place a lot longer and it's harder to look at budgets and things when they're at that stage"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, Scotland)

Whether legal high usage is an increasingly important cause of homelessness was a matter of more disagreement:

*"I don't think it's pushing more young people into homelessness. I just think what it's doing is making the issues that supported accommodation staff, leaving care workers, youth offending workers, what they're working with, with young people does change"* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

*"[legal highs are] a massive issue... a lot of young people are being asked to leave hostels, generic accommodation, their own family homes because of issues with legal highs and they're either having no other option to sleep on the streets or they're choosing to sleep on the streets as well"* (Youth homelessness service provider, Northern Ireland)

This may hang on the extent to which legal highs usage begins before episodes of homelessness or in for instance supported accommodation projects. While key informants were clear that stopping the spread of legal high usage in hostels was extremely challenging, it is not yet clear on available evidence where legal high usage tends to occur – and its causal role - in young people's pathways into and through youth homelessness. The overwhelming concern around NPS – including around the escalation in NPS related deaths in England and Wales – has led the Westminster government to introduce the New Psychoactive Substances Bill which is currently making its way through parliament. The

controversial legislation seeks to ban the supply, import and export of NPS across the UK (Sumnall and Atkinson, 2015)<sup>86</sup>. At the same time, local authorities – according to key informants – appear to be seeking to restrict supply where possibly, with some altering licence agreements to ban NPS use.

## Key points

- Young people being asked to leave the family home continues to be the most common immediate trigger of youth homelessness in the UK. The financial pressure many families are experiencing as a result of welfare reform is therefore a growing concern.
- Young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience homelessness. There is also concern about the housing needs of young migrants and older young people (i.e. those over 18 years old) given restrictions in the welfare entitlements of these groups.
- Critical early warning signs that a young person may be at higher risk of experiencing homelessness than their peers include: experiencing abuse or neglect as a child; experiencing domestic violence, mental health or substance issues within the family home; running away as a child; being a care leaver; truanting or being excluded from school; leaving school with no qualifications; having a history of offending; having learning disabilities; and being a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender young person.
- There is a strong consensus that a higher proportion of young people accessing homelessness services have complex needs than in the past. This may reflect a combination of greater sensitisation to the variety of support needs young people may have in the sector, improvements in homelessness prevention among 'lower need' young people and/or better targeting of services to those in greatest need. Of more concern is the claim that this shift is linked to the decline in generic youth services and specialist support as a consequence of local authority budget cuts.
- Mental health issues among young homeless people, combined with limited access to and uptake of mental health services, is a key challenge for the youth homelessness sector. Providers are seeking to develop the skills and expertise of staff in this area, albeit at a time of increasingly limited budgets and financial pressure.
- In line with a general decline in illicit substance use among young people since the late 1990s, Class A substance misuse is less of a concern for youth homelessness providers than in the past. The sharp increase in young people's use of New Psychoactive Substances is, however, a major challenge for youth homelessness providers, particularly in the North of England, due to the ease with which young people can access these 'legal highs', their low cost, and their negative psychological and behavioural impacts.

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<sup>86</sup> See <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/psychoactivesubstances.html>



## 5. Service provision for young homeless people

Chapter 2 introduced the 'Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway', which aims to provide local authorities and other key stakeholders with a framework within which to develop responses to youth homelessness. It is founded on the belief that "safe, decent and affordable housing underpins achievement of other positive outcomes – whether these relate to education, training, employment, health, or safer communities" (St Basils, 2015, p4). It distinguishes between a number of key stages in young people's homelessness pathway – spanning preventative interventions (universal and targeted), accommodation options for young people requiring varying levels of support, and approaches seeking to enable young homeless people to access employment and build their social networks.

Using this pathway as a framework, this chapter considers key informant perspectives and available evidence on gaps in current youth homelessness provision in the UK. The analysis focuses on the national picture of youth homelessness provision and it should be noted that particular trends and developments at local authority level are likely to vary. The case to invest in or develop any of these interventions in a particular area should be based on an analysis of existing provision in the local area. The chapter highlights models of intervention that appear to offer most in preventing and responding to youth homelessness. Illustrative examples of specific programmes highlighted as promising by key informants are given, though it should be noted that in many cases these programmes have not been formally evaluated. The chapter also seeks to identify key gaps in the evidence base on 'what works' in preventing and resolving youth homelessness.

### The universal offer: the role of school-based interventions

The initial 'universal offer' stage of the positive pathway seeks to ensure that all young people and their parents/families understand young people's housing options and choices, the financial implications and affordability of living independently, and how to avoid (and seek help in the event of) homelessness. This stage seeks to prevent homelessness occurring and to minimise demand on more intensive, targeted services and interventions. It involves working with young people in schools/colleges and providing locality specific advice and information – including online – to young people and their parents/carers (St Basils, 2015).

Key informants in this study saw schools as having an important role to play in preventing youth homelessness (see also Quilgars et al, 2008; Terry, 2011). It was considered that school staff are extremely well placed to identify 'at risk' young people (see 'Targeting young people at risk' section below). Many key informants also saw value in classroom-based interventions (the focus of this section), though there was some disagreement regarding whether such provision should be targeted at particular schools (e.g. those in deprived areas) or offered universally in all schools.

Despite there being a range of established 'models of intervention' available in this area (see below), some key informants perceived there to be "major gap" (Voluntary sector representative, England) in school-based youth homelessness interventions at present: "There's not enough work in schools... young people need better awareness about housing and the realities of that." (Voluntary sector representative, England). Such interventions seek to inform young people about their housing options when they leave home as well as about

the nature of homelessness, dispelling ‘myths’ about the kinds of people that experience homelessness, and letting them know where and how to seek help if they are at risk of homelessness:

*“when you speak to young homeless people the phrase [is] ‘I didn’t know. I didn’t know where to go to, what to do. What are my rights?’ Also they don’t know that this is something that a lot of young people experience. You have to do a lot to break the stereotype of the tramp with the three legged dog, and until you do that young people aren’t going to feel free to talk about the fact that they’re at risk of homelessness”* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

Such interventions are also seen to serve as a ‘reality-check’ for young people, with ‘managing expectations’ seen to be important in a context where young people face constrained housing options that may differ substantially from those faced by their parents and/or ‘norms’ encouraging home ownership as a tenure of choice (Tabner, 2013). Gearing young people up to stay at home for as long as possible and to be ready to share when they do leave home is seen to be crucial in the current context. Key informants also emphasised that school-based interventions should be “city relevant” (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland) rather than generic:

*“as a young person’s sort of starting into their teenage life, I think that’s the perfect time to start working with [them]... there’s just basic stuff like managing expectations... some young people, they think, ‘When I’m 16 I’m going to buy a flat...’ - or, ‘I’m going to buy a house in London,’ and it’s just [about] having that sort of realistic conversation... telling young people what it’s like out there and having a real sense of what it means to be in the wide world”* (Voluntary sector advice service manager, England).

School-based interventions can involve staff from homelessness organisations coming into the school to deliver a workshop or session; teaching staff using materials developed by local authorities/homelessness organisations and/or peer educator models, which involve a young person who has experienced homelessness being trained by a homelessness organisation to deliver education in schools alongside a member of staff (Smith and Duckett, 2010). Peer educator models are particularly highly regarded by those in the sector (Terry, 2011; EOC, 2014). As one key informant put it: “Nothing gets across better than having somebody who’s experienced it, telling you what it’s really like to live as an independent person with very limited income” (Local authority respondent, North of England). There are a number of examples of third sector organisations offering peer educator workshops to schools (see box 1), with a number of Scottish local authorities also offering such programmes (see EOC, 2014 for details).

Some school-based interventions not only seek to provide information about homelessness and housing options, but focus instead or in addition on developing ‘relational’ skills around communication, conflict resolution, positive relationships and anger management, seeking to

address the primary driver of youth homelessness, this being relationship breakdown with parents/family (see chapter 4) (Smith and Duckett, 2010; Insley, 2011)<sup>87</sup>.

Key informants highlighted that take-up of these approaches varies on a school by school basis. Despite some affinity between homelessness and housing-related issues and aspects of the curriculum<sup>88</sup>, covering these issues is not part of the formal curriculum. As such, whether or not (and if so, how) these topics are covered depends on the outlook and engagement of school staff and head teachers:

#### Box 1: Peer education

Peer educator schemes involve young people who are or have been homeless in developing resources to raise awareness among other people, often in school. Examples of such schemes include:

- St Basils' [Schools Training and Mentoring Project](#) (STaMP)
- 1625 Independent People's [Upfront Project](#)
- [Shelter Cymru's peer education project](#). Shelter Cymru have also produced a [Peer Learning Starter Pack](#) to help organisations set up peer education projects.

*"The problem we've got is schools are almost fiefdoms in themselves. So it's really hard to get in. It's up to the head teacher, which I can understand but actually there should be some basics that all young people have and a couple of sessions on homelessness I think they could fit in to the curriculum if they wanted to"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)

*"There's a lot of it happening... but it's not necessarily consistent... the issue being that access to schools is ruled by the head teacher and if the head teacher doesn't understand this sort of area if you like then they won't be as warm to folk coming in and doing something as part of the curriculum"* (Statutory sector key informant, Scotland)

There was a common concern therefore that even where local organisations offered peer and/or professional led education, issues around take up and access mean that many young people do not benefit from them. Even where schools do engage with this area, it was felt that they too often relied on dated and generic resources (e.g. videos) rather than interactive online tools or opportunities to work with third sector youth homelessness organisations. Assertive voluntary sector partners and/or local authorities strongly promoting such activities were seen to offer some means of addressing this, but there was also concern (specifically among participants in England) that in the current fiscal environment little funding was available to support such activity (see also Terry, 2011):

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<sup>87</sup> Depaul UK and the Amber Project both offer such programmes. See Insley, 2011 and [http://www.cyrenians.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/amber/schools.aspx](http://www.cyrenians.org.uk/what_we_do/amber/schools.aspx)

<sup>88</sup> The most obvious affinity is with Personal, Social Health and Economic (PSHE) education. Though PSHE is a non-statutory subject, it is seen to enable schools to meet their wider statutory duties, with recent calls for it to become a compulsory subject (House of Commons Education Committee, 2015 and see <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/content.aspx?CategoryID=1053>). From September 2014, financial literacy is a compulsory component of citizenship education in key stages 3 and 4 (ages 11-16).

*“a lot of local authorities just don't have the capacity to do it and the voluntary sector doesn't either. So I think that's a major gap, really. It's not happening consistently... It just depends on the head teacher... and how organised and confident the local authority... or whichever organisation is delivering it [is]”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

*“provision is so patchy and it's something that has been hit by funding cuts a lot, local authorities saying they can't offer adequate preventative activities so although they think it's a good idea... quite a large proportion don't feel they can meet the demand there is”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

Perhaps reflecting some of these dynamics, Homeless Link's annual youth homeless survey suggests that education work in schools has declined over the year 2013/14 (Homeless Link, 2014d). As well as concerns in the current climate of austerity, key informants indicated that this was also a longer term problem of under-investment and a lack of joint working between schools and the homelessness sector:

*“There has been a chronic under-investment in that... There has not been enough priority given to homelessness and independent living skills in either the Scottish or English education curriculum... And it is a battle... to get schools to give you space on their timetable... because there is so much that is squashed into the PSHE [Personal, Social Health and Economic education]... but actually those bits are super-important... I think that we need education to come on-board and I think that we need some reinvestment by the Scottish Government in that”* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

Government leadership was seen then as one possible route to progress in this regard. Scottish informants saw the ‘Getting It Right For Every Child’ approach (see chapter 2) – and associated indicators used to monitor children and young people's wellbeing – as “driving and informing” (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland) the school-based PSHE agenda. In England, despite the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness endorsing school-based interventions (DCLG, 2012), key informants were doubtful that the current Government would steer schools in this direction in an era where school autonomy has been expanded<sup>89</sup>. This was a source of frustration for one statutory sector homelessness service manager who explained that achieving consistency across schools in terms of housing and homelessness related interventions was impossible without coordination between the relevant government departments (DCLG and the Department of Education) or the devolution of power to mandate school involvement to local authorities. Another contributor saw more potential for locally-led progress, highlighting that local authority leadership from housing and children's services could bring pressure to bear on schools. It was also suggested that effective monitoring of the school-origin of young people using homelessness services can help provide a helpful ‘route in’ to dialogue with particular schools.

Where school-based interventions are used they tend to target young people at key stage 4 (age 14-16) (Smith and Duckett, 2010). Several key informants suggested that focussing interventions at this stage is “too late” and risks missing the opportunity to prevent homelessness and shape young people's expectations and choices. It was proposed that

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<sup>89</sup> For instance, in the establishment of ‘free schools’ and academies.

school-based interventions need to occur “pretty early on” i.e. at age 12/13, with several key informants making the case for even earlier interventions (e.g. in primary school).

Though many of those working in the sector saw school-based interventions as a helpful means of preventing youth homelessness, others were more sceptical about the effectiveness of this kind of approach:

*“I don't necessarily think that much being done in a school will make that much different to a young person who wants to leave. So it has an impact, but it's difficult to assess or analyse exactly what kind of impact that has. How many young people haven't left home because of something that has been taught at school...?”* (Statutory sector key informant, Scotland)

Though there is some qualitative evidence that school-based interventions have been well-received by students (Insley, 2011), there is a lack of robust evidence that they have prevented or reduced the incidence of youth homelessness within a particular peer group. Moreover, as the quotation above highlights, generating such evidence would be challenging and likely very costly given the need to compare the outcomes of peer groups who have experienced such interventions with a control group over a relatively long time-period. In this context, some key informants questioned whether ‘universal’ (and thus relatively costly) school-based interventions are the best use of resources and advocated instead targeting resources at young people at greatest risk of homelessness:

*“in terms of prevention... the best approach entirely ... [is to] approach those young people, those areas which are likely to create the most homelessness... those most deprived areas ... estates etcetera where the most social problems are... this universal, going into schools... I'm not saying it's a bad thing but I don't think it's necessarily focused right, I think it's better to focus [on] working with people like children's services and youth justice services... to make sure that we are getting in early to help prevent that potential homelessness for those young people who... have a more troubled background... and making sure we're a bit more smart on that... I'm not saying there's anything wrong with awareness raising among other groups, but then we're so short of money it's best to target.”* (Local Government representative, Wales)

This perspective would support both the targeting of school-based interventions at particular schools (something that providers offering school-based programmes sought to do) and an increased focus on other means of targeted early intervention (discussed in the next section). There may also be a case for exploring the potential of online tools, apps and social media platforms as a means of providing cost effective universal advice and information for both young people and their parents/carers.

## Early help and targeted approaches

Targeted early help aims to prevent youth homelessness by providing young people at risk of homelessness and their families/carers with the support and advice they need. Where young people are unable to stay in the family home/network, targeted approaches seek to ensure that moves are planned and safe (St Basils, 2015). This section focuses on: (1) the appropriate routes via which effective targeting of at risk young people can be achieved and

(2) the kinds of interventions that promise to best reduce the risk – or minimise the duration – of homelessness for this group of young people.

### Targeting young people at risk

Key informants participating in this study highlighted a range of, at present, under-utilised opportunities to effectively target groups at risk of homelessness, not least because many young people at high risk will already be in touch with services/organisations of various kinds (St Basils, 2015).

Some saw the role of schools and colleges in this regard as key, in addition to (and in some cases, instead of) the ‘universal’ classroom-based approach to housing, homelessness and independent living education discussed above. Schools were perceived to be “very well placed ... [to] identify those children that are struggling” (Statutory sector key informant, Northern Ireland) and there was seen to be value in a “whole-school approach” (Statutory sector key informant, Scotland) in which staff (i.e. teachers, school nurses etc.) are trained and expected to identify and support “young people when it’s clear that their triggers point at a high likelihood of them going into some sort of difficulty” (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England). In such cases, children and young people can be signposted to early support on a range of issues, not just homelessness/housing, but also drugs, sexual health and family relationships (see also Homeless Link, 2015a). Other key informants commented that existing thresholds that trigger additional support for young people (e.g. levels of truancy) should be lowered in order to maximise the potential to prevent more serious problems emerging. This is reinforced by evidence that people who truant from school are at a far higher risk of developing complex needs in later life (Bramley et al, 2015). There is a clear case for focussing greater efforts at preventing homelessness among this group, in addition to those experiencing other “critical early warning signals” (Bramley et al, 2015, p29), including being excluded from mainstream schools (attending Pupil Referral/Re-Integration Units); leaving school with no qualifications; having learning difficulties; and experiencing bullying (Bramley et al, 2015; St Basils, 2015 and see chapter 4).

As noted in chapter 4, care leavers and young offenders have long been recognised as groups at particularly high risk of homelessness. Given that young people in these circumstances are known to and in contact with existing statutory services, they were described by one key informant as a relatively “captive audience” (Local authority respondent, North of England). That these young people continue to ‘fall through the gaps’ between different statutory services is nevertheless well established. Effective joint working protocols between children’s services, youth offending teams and housing/homelessness services are key to identifying young people in these circumstances before they become homeless (Barnardo’s, 2014; NAO, 2015) and that planning prior to – and intensive support during and after – the ‘critical time’ of their transition/discharge from care or prison could improve outcomes. For example, Homeless Link (2015b) have proposed that the key principles of effective ‘discharge planning’ developed through the Department of Health’s 2013/14 Homeless Hospital Discharge Fund could be adapted for use with prison and care leavers, those being: sourcing appropriate accommodation, helping the tenancy set-up process and providing (sometimes long-term) in-tenancy support.

Statutory sector key informants did report examples of improved approaches in working with care leavers and looked after young people in particular. These could be led by the local



authority itself, and involve the co-location of local authority staff in dedicated teams, the directing of additional funding at care leavers, additional priority given to care leavers in social housing allocations schemes (including a strong focus on the neighbourhood and quality of offers) and the use of a traffic light system to flag care leavers whom are considered at particularly high risk of chaotic transitions to independent living. Such responses may become more common in light of reforms extending corporate parenting support to older care leavers across the UK and following the launch in September 2015 of the 'care leavers accommodation and support framework'<sup>90</sup> (see chapter 2). To date, there appears to have been relatively less attention given to developing such approaches for young offenders despite the high risk of homelessness this group face (see chapter 4).

Joint working to identify the most at risk young people in a particular area can also be led by third sector organisations (see box 2). Key informants also commented positively on the role of multi-agency risk management procedures and the 'Early Help' strategies of local authority safeguarding boards in identifying children and young people at risk (HM Government, 2015). It was commented however that "there is increasingly limited non-statutory support to families where there may be young people at risk of homelessness" (Voluntary sector representative, England), with much family support targeted at families with young children. The DCLG Troubled Families programme was described as "the only bit of growth" in this area. The controversial programme targets families who have children regularly truanting from school, have an adult on out of work benefits, cause high costs to the taxpayer and/or are involved in youth crime and anti-social behaviour<sup>91</sup> and seeks to

#### **Box 2: EMPHASIS, Llamau**

Llamau, a Welsh youth homelessness charity offers long-term support to the most excluded and non-engaged 14-19 year olds. Through the EMPHASIS (Engaging, Motivating, Participating with Homeless young people And Supporting them In Self-development) project they work closely with schools, substance misuse agencies, education welfare services, youth services, youth offending services, alternative education providers and career support services to find young people on the verge of social exclusion who are engaged in challenging/chaotic behaviour at school or at home (including offending, substance misuse and mental health issues) and who are therefore at greater risk of homelessness. Though the programme has not been formally evaluated, it is seen to achieve a range of positive outcomes, including improvement in the mental health and wellbeing of young people supported by the programme, reductions in anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and offending (and associated financial savings). The flexibility (when and where the young person chooses), 'stickiness' (for as long as they need), and individually tailored nature of support offered is seen to be core to the programme's success.

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<sup>90</sup> See [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/Put-care-leavers-in-the-driving-seat-so-they-can-choose-their-housing/press\\_releases.htm?ref=108907](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/Put-care-leavers-in-the-driving-seat-so-they-can-choose-their-housing/press_releases.htm?ref=108907)

<sup>91</sup> To be targeted for help under the programme, families must meet three of these four criteria.



work with them to improve school attendance, reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour, and get adults closer to work<sup>92</sup>.

It was explained that “sometimes the answer for the family is moving the young person out... get rid of the teenager and then everybody's all right” (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England) and thus it was seen to “make sense for there to be a close strategic join up” (Voluntary sector representative, England) between youth homelessness organisations and the Troubled Families Programme:

*“there has been a lot of work around Troubled Families... but I don't think that that has resulted in particularly picking up the issues of teenagers or those approaching teens being threatened with homelessness and how to intervene in that in early stages.”*  
(Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)

Developing opportunities to access and work with a wider range of struggling families in the community (not just those falling within the narrow Troubled Families Programme criteria) was seen as a current gap in provision (see below).

A range of other institutions were also seen to have a role to play in identifying at risk children, young people and their families:

*“I think what we need more agencies picking up the signs in terms of like schools, GPs, youth clubs, community centres, wherever young people are.”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)

*“looking at GPs and Jobcentres and other agencies that could play more of a role around homelessness prevention”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

As these quotes suggest, a broad range of service providers were seen as likely to come into contact with young people at risk of homelessness and/or their parents/carers, suggesting scope to increase joint working to identify early signs of crisis. The role of health services in this regard was also identified as a gap in a recent Homeless Link report exploring the links between health and homelessness (Homeless Link, 2015a).

In the case of young runaways (a group at high risk of homelessness as they get older, see chapter 4), the police were seen to be in a particular useful position to refer young people and their families on to wider support services when the missing child is returned home (Mitchell et al, 2014). Not all young runaways are reported missing to, or returned home by the police (Rees, 2011) however, and thus programmes in this area (see for example box 3) also work in partnership with colleges/schools, skills organisations, voluntary sector organisations and social work (Morton et al, 2014). Thompson (2014) further calls for public transport providers and those who own and manage public spaces like shopping centres to display information and runaway services as evidence suggests that these are among the places young runaways go when they are missing. Despite some examples of programme's working with young runaways to reduce their risk of experiencing homelessness, there is strong concern, echoed by key informants in this study, about the lack of services focusing on this group (in part due to the closure of such services in recent years), with particular

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<sup>92</sup> An evaluation of the programme is currently underway and expected to report in late 2015. See <http://www.niesr.ac.uk/projects/evaluation-troubled-families-programme>

problems reported as regards accessing suitable emergency accommodation, counselling and mental health services (Smith and Duckett, 2010; EOC, 2014; Thompson, 2014). Adequate services in this arena are seen as important not just to prevent homelessness, but also due to the known link between running away from home and sexual exploitation (both in the home as a reason for running away and as a vulnerability whilst missing) (see chapter 4).

### **Box 3: The Safe and Sound Project**

The Safe and Sound project works in and around Dundee in Scotland with 14-24 year olds at risk of or experiencing homelessness, many of whom have run away from home or are thinking of doing so in the future. The project offers families and young people practical support and mediation to resolve disputes and improve communication, thus seeking to prevent future crisis and homelessness. Through a partnership with the police, all young runaways in Dundee should be offered a referral to Safe and Sound from the police officer who returns them to their home. The project also works with colleges/schools, skills organisations, voluntary sector organisations and social work to identify young people at risk (see Morton et al, 2014).

As also noted in chapter 4, the closure of youth services (e.g. youth clubs and youth centres) was seen to be one trend meaning that young people at risk of homelessness are less likely to access preventative support than in the past. It could also be argued that such services support the development of young people's social networks, which improve young people's resilience to homelessness and offer support through experiences of homelessness (Tabner, 2013). The lack of such provision is thus clearly seen to be an important and growing gap, with key informants advocating for 'open door' services "where young people can get together with other young people who are in a similar situation and be relaxed and be in a safe place and have people available they can ask for help" (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, Scotland). Such provision can take the form of: youth clubs and youth centres (see Bashir et al, 2013); open drop ins for young people run by youth homelessness or other charities; youth cafes, often set up by the young people themselves with adult support (Prince's Trust, 2005); or specialist services aimed at particular groups of young people e.g. LGBT youth (Unison, 2014b; AKT, 2015).

One key informant made a case for a 'health and wellbeing' focus within open door youth services as a means of tackling mental health issues (see chapter 4) in a non-threatening and non-stigmatising way. Several key informants felt that youth provision is likely to be particularly effective in identifying young people at risk if it is targeted in areas of relative deprivation/disadvantage. Such an approach has been described by the young person's charity Catch 22 as 'targeted universalism', which involves providing universal services (offered to all young people, regardless of whether they are 'at risk') in targeted deprived communities. Services are designed to be visible to everyone in the local community to encourage access/engagement and avoid stigma (see Catch 22, 2011).

There therefore appear to be a range of mechanisms via which the targeting and identification of young people at risk of homelessness might be improved or developed. A number of support services and interventions were seen to be crucial in working with young people at risk and the overwhelming focus here was on improving the relationships between

young people and their families via mediation, parenting and whole-family support, combined where appropriate with respite options.

## Mediation

Mediation<sup>93</sup> has been seen as a crucial response to homelessness for over a decade, driven in part by the requirement for local authorities – in England from 2002 and more recently Wales and Scotland – to adopt proactive preventative approaches. From early on, it was seen to be a particularly important part of the response to youth homelessness reflecting that the primary cause of youth homelessness is family/friend exclusions (Cullen, 2004). Some controversy has surrounded the use of mediation in light of reports that it may be being used to delay, prevent or divert people making a formal statutory homelessness application rather than to genuinely prevent homelessness (Pawson et al, 2007; Ng, 2011). It has also been emphasised in good practice guides that mediation is not suitable for all at risk young people, in particular for some care leavers and other young people where there may be safeguarding issues relating to violence and abuse in the family home (Shelter, 2004; Pawson, 2007; Campbell and Mackie, 2011; EOC, 2014).

These caveats notwithstanding, it is clear that mediation for young people at risk of homelessness continues to be seen as one core element of youth homelessness provision (Dore, 2011; Tabner, 2013; Homeless Link, 2014d; St Basils, 2015), both as a potential means to prevent homelessness occurring, but also as a means of ensuring that if the young person must leave the family home, this is done in a planned way and family relationships are maintained insofar as possible<sup>94</sup>.

*“It’s [mediation is] not a panacea, but what it can do is, even if young people are going to present as homeless, it is in a more planned way and people can maintain positive contact with their family, which might lead to better successes in the future... it is helping young people maintain contact with families that perhaps they would otherwise have severed entirely, so even if it doesn’t result in young people staying at home it does result in them being more available to communicate and receive support from families.”* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

*“Our experience shows that we need to have a mediation service and we try and [get] young people back... to their families ... but what’s really important here is not just trying to get them to go back home. It’s actually the reconnection... because actually for young people isolation is a big problem in terms of mental health problems... we want young people to stay home if they’re safe and then leave in a planned way. That’s much better for them.”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)

Available evidence also suggests that mediation is likely to be a cost-effective approach, potentially making substantial savings by reducing the need for (or length of) temporary accommodation placement (Pawson, 2007). Despite the apparently widespread consensus

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<sup>93</sup> Mediation is “a process for resolving disagreements in which an impartial third party (the mediator) helps people in dispute to find a mutually acceptable resolution” (Shelter, 2006).

<sup>94</sup> Dore (2011) noted a tension between the aims of Scottish local authorities and mediators in this regard, with the former focused on preventing homelessness and the latter focused on restoring relationships. The study did not however find evidence of explicit pressure, coercion or “gatekeeping” through mediation.

regarding the importance of mediation, key informants participating in this study saw current provision as insufficient and uneven geographically:

*“mediation in families certainly needs to be much higher... There is a small amount of money for mediation in [name of city]. There is none that I see in the other local authorities that I work with... And where it is there, I don't think it's anything like enough”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)

*“it's uneven and I think it does vary authority to authority”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

As well as varying by local authority, it also seems that mediation provision varies across the UK nations. Mediation appears to have received particular attention in Scotland (Dore, 2011; Tabner, 2013; EOC, 2014) including via the Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution set up in 2014<sup>95</sup>. Scottish key informants commented that “there's been quite a lot of effort being put into a whole variety of mediation services” (Statutory sector key informant, Scotland) chiming with the findings of EOC inquiry that mediation is “commonly used” to try and prevent youth homelessness (EOC, 2014, 26). Key informants were thus surprised by the first statistical return detailing prevention activity across Scotland (Scottish Government, 2015b), with mediation-related activities making up a minimal proportion of activity (less than 1%), hypothesising that this may be a recording issue with the new statistics (see also Dore, 2015).

A 2010 review of youth homelessness in Northern Ireland identified substantial gaps in mediation provision and considerable unmet demand for such support (CHNI, 2010) and according to key informants in Northern Ireland, early intervention work remains a significant gap in provision today:

*“a lot of young people in terms of talking about their journeys into homelessness have said that they do feel homelessness could have been prevented if there was some sort of intervention earlier, because it has been something that has spiralled out of control. But they do think that it would have been fixable at that time, but there's just no going back now.”* (Youth homelessness service provider, Northern Ireland)

New Welsh legislation offers the potential to ensure a minimum level of prevention activity – including mediation – across all local authorities in Wales (Mackie, 2015 and see chapter 2). In England, Homeless Link (2014d) report a slight increase in the number of local authorities with access to mediation services between 2012 and 2014 (from 71% to 77%). Official local authority homelessness prevention statistics tell a slightly different story, with the number of prevention actions involving mediation dropping 11% in the last year and by a third since 2011<sup>96</sup>. Mediation now makes up only 1%<sup>97</sup> of all local authority prevention and relief cases<sup>98</sup>. Cases involving conciliation (including home visits for family or friend threatened

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<sup>95</sup> The Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution was established by the homelessness charity Cyrenians in 2014 and aims to reduce family conflict. It is a national resource centre for best practice in conflict resolution, mediation and early intervention work. See <http://scottishconflictresolution.org.uk/>

<sup>96</sup> Calculated from DCLG Prevention and Relief live table 788

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Prevention involves enabling people to avoid homelessness e.g. by assisting them to obtain alternative accommodation or enabling them to remain in their existing home. Relief occurs when an authority has been

exclusions) have, by contrast, increased by 14% over the last year, which may suggest that there has been a shift away from offering formal mediation towards less intensive/specialist engagement with families, potentially driven by the financial pressures facing local authorities. It should be noted that these prevention statistics are not broken down by age, so do not give a clear picture of trends in mediation/conciliation work with 16-24 year olds specifically.

There is clearly then both scope and support within the sector for more mediation work, especially (but not only) in geographical areas that are currently very poorly served. Key informant perspectives also suggest that greater consideration should be given to the exact nature of the mediation on offer. As one Scottish key informant commented “there's a whole variety of ways that local authorities are doing mediation” (Statutory sector key informant, Scotland). This can vary on a number of dimensions including: the timing of mediation (at/before crisis; offered immediately; or access via waiting list); whether offered ‘in house’ by the local authority or by a voluntary sector partner; whether offered by ‘generalist’ with some mediation training or a mediation specialist; whether informal or formal; whether voluntary or compulsory.

Though it was felt that various models of mediation are useful and may be more or less appropriate in specific areas, there was particular support for mediation offered early to at risk young people (including for under 16s), rather than at the point of crisis, when it is seen to be least effective (see also Dore, 2011):

*“I will argue until I'm blue in the face that local authority mediation teams that only get involved when the young person is there with your rucksack, and hasn't eaten for two days, that is not the time for mediation... And yet there is a current lack of investment in mediation for before that point”* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

*“You know that kind of formal mediation where, 'We'll make you a mediation appointment; come back in six weeks'? I'm not talking about that... as long as there are no safeguarding issues to investigate or risk indicators on the system, within 24 - 48 hours, going and visiting quickly just trying to get into the family home and find out what's going on and using mediation and negotiation skills... find out what you can do to prevent it.”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

Also, there is a need (where possible) for mediation to be offered by skilled specialist mediators (rather than generalist with mediation skills):

*“I would always go for a mediator myself. I think they are trained professionals who do an amazing kind of job, but... if the only option you have is a generalist who has some mediation it's better than nothing.”* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

While key informants agreed that mediation is not always appropriate (see above), there was disagreement regarding whether it should be offered at the discretion of local authority providers, offered as default to young people but optional, or be compulsory in the remaining cases. While some key informants argued that young people should not be able to opt out of

mediation (where there are no safeguarding issues), others were concerned that this may drive young people away from support and into more dangerous circumstances:

*“if you think about what's in the best interests of the young people long-term, staying at home or within the family network is likely to be much better than the experience of homelessness unless there are safeguarding issues. So it's to not even offer it as mediation. It's just, 'This is what we do. You've come to us saying that you're homeless, you're young. The problem is with your family; we need to go and talk to your family to see what we can do to try and sort it out'. My view is that it shouldn't be optional because the experience of homelessness is so damaging. That's what young people looking back on their experience tell us consistently”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

*“the difficulty arises when actually you have to go through mediation until you can actually be referred [to an accommodation service]. That is potentially a problem, because that actually means that some young people actually just leave and go on the streets and don't leave in a planned way”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)

Adopting a compulsory approach may thus be seen as a high risk strategy, but it was acknowledged that how mediation is offered to young people and their families is crucial and that there may be scope to increase uptake of mediation services:

*“despite relationship breakdown continuing to be the major cause of homelessness, mediation has always had issues attracting referrals because of homelessness/housing options staff being ignorant of the benefits of mediation, too busy to make a referral or not describing mediation in a helpful way”* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

#### **Box 4: Mediation services**

**Amber** This Edinburgh-based mediation and support service works with 14-24 year olds at risk of homelessness, and with young people who have already left home. Referrals are accepted from any source (most frequently via schools, social work and self-referral). Key to the model is a quick response to referrals - contact within two working days and meeting with young people/their families within a working week. Project data indicate high client satisfaction and effectiveness, with three quarters of young people able to remain or return home.

**Llamau** offer a youth-focused Family Mediation service in Wales, working with 16-17 year olds, accepting referrals from anywhere and with an emphasis on quick responses/minimising waiting times. Project data provided by Llamau suggests that of the 3103 new cases worked with in the last three years, 2169 young people (70%) have remained or returned home. In addition to preventing homelessness among young people, such projects potentially generate substantial savings in temporary accommodation costs (Pawson et al, 2007).

## Family and parenting support

The role of mediation was seen to be important in a context where holistic, family-focused interventions are few and far between. Several key informants emphasised the importance of providing support not just to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, but also to their parents/carers:

*“quite often there has historically been... no connection between looking at a young person's needs and then what's the adult's needs for them to stay in a family... So we know that young people who are becoming homeless are coming from families that often have multiple needs, and we look at the young person as being an issue and how do we get them home. We don't necessarily look at what is the situation of their family and how do you deal with that”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)

*“you can fix the young person. You know, they can make commitments to improving their behaviour and coming home at 10:00 and reducing their cannabis use, but if the parent has paranoid schizophrenia and has no support around that, or has just lost their mum and is angry at the world and taking that out on their child, like whatever... So yes, I think support for parents is key”* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

While the Troubled Families Programme and Family Intervention Programmes offer some families this kind of intensive support – albeit without a youth homelessness focus (see above) – there was seen to be a severe dearth of outreach and support work to a broader group of families who may be struggling. Mediation was seen as one means of offering whole-family support, but there was a clear sense among key informants that the offer to parents/carers in these families could be improved:

*“we need to be doing more work with families. Family support is critical, family support, parenting support, especially for parents of teenagers... there's nothing really for those parents of teenagers... it's preventing the crisis or reducing it before it happens so parents actually have the tools which they need really”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)

*“[we need] investment in additional mediation which is informal and with very skilled mediators who can go in and work with families... It's almost like family therapy... A lot of these problems are about families and families just wanting more support - they need some light at the end of the tunnel. They need to feel that they're being listened to and that they're going to get some support... it's really trying to be very, very family focused and that is a gap.”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

Key informants had various ideas about the kinds of support that could be developed in this area. One suggested a similar model to Home Start<sup>99</sup>, a UK-wide organisation which trains volunteer-parents to offer support to other families struggling with a wide range of practical, emotional, physical and mental health problems. This service focuses on families with at least one child under 5 years old, but a similar model could be adopted for families with adolescent/older children living at home. Another proposed model was a community-based

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<sup>99</sup> See <http://www.home-start.org.uk/>



parenting programme that would be psychologically informed<sup>100</sup> and aim to help parents understand the context and lives of their adolescent children with a view to easing the pressures associated with young people living in the family home into young adulthood:

*“that's where the tension is... we know that there is likely to be an expectation that young people will have to stay at home longer, but there're also lots and lots of parents that find that really, really difficult and then vroom... and if it erupts or the relationship's so poor and it's bad for everybody, it's bad for everybody's health, it's bad for the young person. So what we're looking at is seeing if we can... develop something that could be just freely accessible... and it would be non-stigmatised, it's not about you're a poor parent or anything, it would be... accessible... through night school, colleges, in libraries, hotels, because you hear lots of parents that are just at wits end and they don't know what to do next and they're worried and they're anxious that they don't understand the environment the young people are in, they don't understand all the IT stuff, they don't understand the drugs, you know, all sorts”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England)

Reflecting the major mental health related problems associated with youth homelessness discussed in chapter 4, there was also seen to be a big gap in mental health provision for young people. Across the UK, delays accessing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) were reported alongside concerns about the very difficult transition young people face between child and adolescent, and adult mental health services, usually at around age 18 (see chapter 4). Some key informants voiced particular concerns for young people in their late teens and early 20s who must navigate adult services but are still often in the transition to adulthood developmentally. Improvements to such provision offer one means of supporting struggling families and preventing youth homelessness where it is possible to do so.

### **Emergency accommodation: respite and time out approaches**

For some young people, mediation and wider family support will not be sufficient to ensure that they can stay in the family home. In these cases, some form of alternative accommodation options need to be provided. In circumstances where a return home is unsafe or impossible, longer-term accommodation options will need to be found (see below), but there is also a continuing need for shorter-term emergency accommodation. In almost all cases, the cost of both emergency and longer-term accommodation is currently met by Housing Benefit, raising the crucial question of how it will be funded for 18-21 year olds following planned removal of automatic entitlement to Housing Benefit for this age group in 2017 (see chapter 2).

Given the concerns regarding B&Bs and poor quality hostel accommodation discussed in chapter 2 there is clearly scope to increase the provision of alternative forms of emergency accommodation. Key informants in this study were particularly positive about models that provide good quality emergency accommodation for young people that offers flexible respite or ‘time out’ to struggling families, combined with mediation and family support:

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<sup>100</sup> Psychologically informed approaches are increasingly common within homelessness organizations, see below.

*"Is there a little bit of respite, three days of the young people being somewhere else and trying to do some work with the family to try and sort out and understand what the issues are and moving forward. Even if the young person can't stay there long-term, that it's a planned move rather than that very difficult fractured move where they've all fallen out."* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

*"I'm convinced that the combination of Nightstop and family mediation is a necessity for every local authority... I do think it's essential that it [Nightstop provision] sits alongside family mediation so that the opportunity is to return young people home when they can go home, and when they can't go home establishing the lines of support so that the connectivity back to home is as strong as it possibly can be because that will increase the young person's life chances moving forward into the future. That would be my sort of golden egg for prevention/early intervention."* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

Key informants further expressed a preference for such emergency accommodation to be non-institutional where possible, advocating the use of 'community hosting' in which young people are able to stay with 'host' private households (see box 5 on Nightstop and box 7 below on Supported Lodgings). Such an approach was seen not only as a means of keeping young people out of poor quality (e.g. B&B or hostel) accommodation but also as a means of keeping young people outside of the homelessness system and the wider social influences and networks they would be exposed to within other forms of emergency accommodation:

#### **Box 5: Depaul Nightstop UK**

[Depaul Nightstop UK](#) is a network of 38 accredited Nightstop services providing emergency accommodation for homeless young people. Nightstop services are provided by a variety of organisations including small independent charities, Barnardo's, YMCA and Depaul UK. They provide emergency accommodation for 16-25 year olds in the homes of approved volunteer hosts who receive training and support. Placements vary from one night to several weeks depending on the availability of hosts and the needs of the young person.

*"[Respite is] a diversion from young people going into, particularly under 20s, going into what could be really unpleasant and unnecessary temporary accommodation"* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

*"I think we should have separate arrangements which are about an emergency suitable placement for the purposes of young people that become homeless, which is about all of the intervention that should be happening before that decision is made if they need a longer-term housing solution... Because I think sometimes if you introduce young people immediately into provision that is about young people living outside the family home immediately, it can give young people the wrong message."* (Statutory sector key informant, Northern Ireland)

*"I think the benefit of a Nightstop type provision is that it keeps young people out of institutional care and support so they don't touch it, and I think the longer you can hold people out of the system the better"* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

Non-institutional forms of emergency accommodation that offer respite or 'time out' for struggling families have been endorsed by a number of key organisations and commentators for over a decade (Shelter, 2004; Insley, 2011; Smith and Duckett, 2010; Quilgars et al, 2011, NCAS et al, 2011; Homeless Link, 2013b). Nightstop has been identified as a particular promising model for young runaways (Thompson, 2014), with one key informant in this study seeing it as a valuable form of provision for young rough sleepers who may feel less comfortable in all age rough sleeper provision (e.g. night shelters and NSNO hubs).

There seems to have been some increase in the availability of Supported Lodgings and Nightstop accommodation in recent years (Homeless Link, 2013c and 2014c), but these forms of accommodation remain available in only 66% and 42% of local authorities respectively, with key informants involved in this study reporting patchy and inadequate provision across the UK. It is not clear how common it is for the provision of these kinds of accommodation to be combined with intensive family support/mediation, nor is there a great deal of evidence on the effectiveness or costs of such models. One small-scale study of Nightstop provision<sup>101</sup> suggests positive experiences of community hosting on the part of both: (a) young people – who reported improvements in their health, reduced stress and community integration; and (b) hosts – who valued the opportunity to host young people in their home. Challenges were identified in accessing sufficient numbers of hosts, however, meaning that young people sometimes experienced disruptive moves between different hosts (Insley, 2011). One key informant emphasised that despite “some kind of anecdotal theory” about why ‘community hosting’ models might work well for young people, there is a lack of systematic research and “we need to really clarify what does work” (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide). With caveats regarding the evidence base borne in mind, there appears to be scope and support for increased investment in and provision of non-institutional forms of emergency accommodation, combined with family support/mediation.

## Accommodation options

Where young homeless people are unable to stay in or return to the family home with the support of the kinds of interventions discussed above, longer-term accommodation options are needed. These range from supported accommodation for those with complex needs who need high levels of support, to those who need lower levels of 'life skills' support, and those who simply need decent affordable accommodation with little or no support provision. Given this diversity of support needs and preferences within the youth homeless population, combined with varying housing and labour market contexts across the UK, the key message arising from this study is for the development of a range of options that cater for young homeless people in different circumstances and – given that young people's circumstances (in terms of income, employment and relationships with family) and support needs are dynamic – for the maximisation of opportunities to move between these kinds of provision when required. This section identified a number of gaps in the kinds of youth homelessness accommodation available and highlights effective/promising interventions and models that seek to fill them. It should be borne in mind that the removal of automatic Housing Benefit entitlement from 18-21 year olds may require new thinking on the ways in which such

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<sup>101</sup> Insley (2011) used Nightstop services across 6 areas in England and Scotland to distribute questionnaires to young people using Nightstop services and Nightstop hosts. 23 young people and 18 hosts from 4 areas completed the questionnaire, and 8 follow up telephone interviews were conducted with young people.

accommodation can be funded, albeit that details of exemptions and alternative funding streams for youth homelessness accommodation are not yet clear.

### Accommodation for those with high support needs

A particular gap in provision was identified for young people with complex needs who require high levels of support in order to escape homelessness, sustain accommodation and address their complex needs (around addiction, offending, anti-social behaviour, mental health etc.):

*“There always has been this gap for the 18s and over, particularly those where there's no statutory duty owing, who have got complicated needs, who bounce around the system.”* (Voluntary sector representative, England).

*“there're some very specific initiatives that need to focus around a highly complex group of young people with multiple needs. There has to be a housing element to it but the issues are far more complex than that... that's a very small group of people but they need a lot of investment that has to carry across a whole range of different - the silo funding doesn't work for this group at all and it needs to be kind of pooled interventions here”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)

Concerns were expressed about the difficulties associated with such young people being accommodated in provision with insufficient support available, particularly around their mental health needs and behavioural issues. Where support is of sufficient quality, supported accommodation was seen as a valuable (albeit expensive) resource for this group, particularly in light of the fact that their likely only alternative would be shared PRS accommodation:

*“supported housing is brilliant for them [i.e. those with high support needs] because it gives them that support, it's safe, it's well managed, it's decent, they learn lots of life skills and a lot of them need it because they haven't had that development, they haven't had the parenting that has helped them develop those kind of skills. But it is expensive. You can't make it cheaper”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England)

Key informants emphasised the negative consequences for young people living in provision where support is inadequate, in particular where they are living in congregate hostel-type accommodation alongside other young people with traumatic experiences and complex needs. In the worst cases this can create unsafe environments (including violence in extreme cases) and exacerbate young people's existing issues.

In Newcastle, evictions from supported accommodation led to joint working to develop a consensus about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour within hostels. This is now reflected in Sustaining Tenancies Guidance<sup>102</sup> and regular meetings to discuss hostel residents at risk of eviction from supported accommodation (Harding et al, 2013; see also Maguire et al, 2012). Where congregate accommodation models seek to meet the needs of this subset of young homeless people, it was emphasised that the quality of

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<sup>102</sup> See

[http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/drupalncc.newcastle.gov.uk/files/wwwfileroot/housing/housing\\_advice/pep\\_final\\_jan\\_13.pdf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/drupalncc.newcastle.gov.uk/files/wwwfileroot/housing/housing_advice/pep_final_jan_13.pdf)

support providing is essential, with some key informants also emphasising the importance of such accommodation project being small-scale.

An area of consensus was on the importance of ‘Psychologically Informed Environments’ (PIE) in youth homelessness services and accommodation projects (see box 6). Positive outcome in youth homelessness services – including a reduction in the number of ‘unplanned departures’ and young people being asked to leave due to behavioural issues – have been reported by organisations who have adopted the PIE approach (see Keats et al, 2012). One key informant described working in a psychologically informed way as “critical” (Voluntary sector representative, England), and another explained how adopting such an approach is increasingly necessary, albeit challenging at a time when budgets are increasingly under pressure:

*“you've got external clinical supervision coming in to deliver individual and group reflective practice, and all of those elements add cost over and above core training needs associated with safety and safeguarding and so on... you are being asked to deliver the same service for less money, and yet the needs are increasing and, therefore, the training and development needs are increasing in order to meet that need safely.... So yes, it's a big demand, a big call on the organisation... We don't think we've got any choice because of the nature of the problems that young people are facing.”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

Key informants involved in this project reported the mainstreaming of such approaches in some homelessness organisations and that some English local authorities require all commissioned homelessness services to have adopted psychologically informed approaches. As noted earlier in this chapter, a youth homelessness organisation in England

#### **Box 6: Psychologically Informed Environments**

A [Psychologically Informed Environment](#) is a place or a service in which the overall approach and the day-to-day running have been consciously designed to take into account the psychological and emotional needs of the service users. The term was first used in 2010 (see Maguire et al, 2010) though has parallels with the trauma-informed care approach that has a somewhat longer history in the US (see Prestige, 2014). PIEs aim to enable people experiencing homelessness to achieve a range of outcomes, including establishing and maintaining relationships, reducing drug or alcohol use, feeling less depressed or fearful or addressing behavioural issues (Keats et al, 2012). It does not aim to replace clinical services, but rather help enable this group access mainstream services, stabilise their circumstances and crucially, address the fact that services for homeless people are deemed to sometimes use approaches that put clients at risk of repeat homelessness.

The PIE approach focuses on five main areas: (1) developing a psychological framework within the service (e.g. based on cognitive behavioural therapy or psychodynamic approaches); (2) designing the physical environment and social spaces around the needs of the client; (3) training and supporting staff through reflective practice; (4) managing relationships between staff and clients; and (5) evaluating outcomes (Maguire et al, 2012; see also Prestige, 2014).



is now piloting psychologically informed parenting classes. Somewhat less progress seems to have been made elsewhere in the UK, with key informants from the devolved nations advocating for progress in this area.

Though some key informants emphasised the features of congregate high-support accommodation they see as ensuring effectiveness, others resisted hostel-type accommodation as an appropriate housing option for young people reflecting the range of concerns discussed in chapter 2. For example, one noted that:

*“my big thing about people who become homeless is that just in supported housing or hostels, or whatever - which in my discussions with young people they don’t particularly like... is there is very much a lot of other young people around, sometimes that can be a bad... because actually it perpetuates certain behaviour”* (Local Government representative, Wales)

Two models were seen as offering promising alternatives: Supported Lodgings and Housing First. Supported Lodgings (see box 7) have been developed over the last 15 years or so, in part driven by the need to develop flexible accommodation options for young people leaving care that offer a family environment and a more gradual transition from care to independent living than a potentially isolating independent tenancy (Smith and Duckett, 2010; NCAS et al, 2011; Broad, 2009; CLG, 2008). They have since been embraced as an important accommodation option for young homeless people more generally (CLG, 2008; Beckett et al, 2010). There is some evidence that a higher proportion of young people accommodated in Support Lodgings achieve positive outcomes around employment, education and training than those in other types of provision<sup>103</sup>; that Supported Lodgings schemes have lower placement failure rates compared to congregate forms of supported accommodation; and that young people are positive about this kind of accommodation (CLG, 2008). Due to the absence of initial and ongoing building related costs and the flexibility of Supported Lodgings, it is also seen to be a cost-effective form of supported accommodation (CLG, 2008), though issues have been reported in relation to the recruitment of hosts (Broad, 2009), in part related to the poor ‘financial deal’ offered to potential hosts<sup>104</sup>.

#### **Box 7: Supported Lodgings Schemes**

Supported Lodgings provide young people with a room in a private home with an approved and trained host, and support (for host and young person) from the Supported Lodging scheme. Though Supported Lodgings can be used for short-term placements (similar to the Nightstop model, see box 5 above), they are also used for longer placements of up to several years.

Given this albeit limited positive evidence, combined with concerns about the exposure of young people to problematic behaviour, peer pressure, risk of exploitation and bullying in hostel-type accommodation (see chapter 2) and institutionalisation (see above), Supported Lodgings potentially offer a particularly valuable form of non-institutional supported accommodation for young people and key informants were enthusiastic about their wider adoption. Though it was acknowledged that this model would not suit all young people, it was considered that given appropriate training and matching of hosts with young people, the

<sup>103</sup> Supported accommodation, floating support and Foyers.

<sup>104</sup> See <http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/04cc737831d901cf6f6ac399614cc565.pdf>

model may be appropriate for young people with complex needs who have struggled in institutional accommodation settings (see also Broad, 2009). There is seen to be scope to both scale up the extent of Supported Lodgings provision and to better understand the key components of successful community hosting models (both emergency Nightstop and longer term Supported Lodgings variants). Though this study has highlighted quite some support for these models, as opposed to congregate supported accommodation models, it should be noted that robust evidence on their relative effectiveness in facilitating positive outcomes for young people remains lacking.

The second proposed accommodation model was 'Housing First', an approach originally designed to address the needs of chronically homeless people with severe mental illness, and later with chronically homeless people with substance misuse problems. Housing First involves moving those who are homeless into permanent independent tenancies, with no preconditions (i.e. that the tenant is 'housing ready' or is complying with behavioural conditions e.g. abstinence from drugs/alcohol, engagement in treatment). It thus differs from traditional 'staircase' models that attempt to 'fix' clients to make them 'housing ready', but is instead premised on the assumption that the best place to prepare for independent living is in independent accommodation (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; Gaetz, 2014a). Further to this, it advocates the use of 'normal' (scatter-site) housing and the provision of intensive and flexible support which is not time-limited, that is, is available to service users for as long as needed (Busch-Geertsema, 2013) (see box 8). Evidence from America, Canada and Europe indicates the effectiveness of the model in achieving housing retention for the chaotic groups targeted, with some (though less definitive) evidence that it may also enable some clients to better address substance misuse issues and mental/physical health issues (Johnsen and

#### **Box 8: Housing First**

The key elements of the Housing First model, as described by Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010), are:

- Immediate provision of independent accommodation in 'normal' scatter-site housing.
- No requirement regarding 'housing readiness' i.e. no admission criteria concerning sobriety, basic living skills or motivation to change. Housing is viewed as a human right, not something to be earned or used as an incentive.
- A harm reduction, rather than abstinence approach to substance misuse. Consumers may refuse treatment for mental health/substance problems without compromising their housing.
- Provision of permanent housing and support. Housing retained for service users even if temporarily incarcerated/hospitalised. Support is not time-limited.
- Respect for consumer choice regard choice of apartment/furnishings and level of engagement with/location/timing of support. Minimal requirement re engagement with support (e.g. twice per month for first year).
- Provision of integrated and comprehensive community-based support. Support teams (which are on call 24/7) often include social workers, nurses, psychiatrists, peer counsellors and employment workers.
- Targeting the most vulnerable consumers, that is, those who struggle to succeed in traditional services.



Teixeira, 2010; Busch-Geertsema, 2013; Bretherton and Pleace, 2015). It has now been adopted by a number of organisations working across the UK<sup>105</sup>.

Such an extensive evidence base has not yet been established regarding the specific effectiveness of Housing First for young people, with calls for greater exploration of whether the model works with and how it can be adapted to best suit this group (Quilgars et al, 2011; Bretherton and Pleace, 2015). Promisingly, a review of the Housing First based Danish Homelessness Strategy concluded that Housing First principles apply equally to young homeless and older/more entrenched homeless people (Benjaminsen, 2013). In particular, the review indicates that:

*“for the large majority of young homeless individuals, housing in independent scattered housing with floating social support remains the most favourable option, whereas congregate housing for young people seems to involve the same risk for social conflicts, stress and an environment marked by addiction problems and other social problems, as this form of housing does for homeless individuals in general”* (Benjaminsen, 2013, p127).

On the other hand, there are some indications from a large-scale Canadian Housing First evaluation that the model may work more effectively with older participants (Goering et al, 2014), although several smaller youth specific Housing First programmes in Canada indicate successful outcomes in terms of housing retention, income stability and access to services, while at the same time concluding that the independent housing model may be experienced as isolating by some young people (Gaetz, 2014b). This echoes the suggestion in the UK that transitional models may remain important to young homeless people given their life stage, with an emphasis on immediate access to self-contained permanent accommodation less relevant (Quilgars et al, 2011). Gaetz (2014b) argues that the Housing First model is “clearly a viable, effective and preferred option for some youth, but perhaps not all” (p163) and that independent accommodation options should be considered one among several housing options within the Housing First umbrella, in addition to returning home/reconnection with family, supported accommodation and transitional (congregate or separate) accommodation (with a view to subsequent move on to independent living with support). He further adds that the support integral to the Housing First model should be specifically tailored to young people, with the end goal being “not merely... to facilitate a successful transition to independent living, but rather to support a healthy transition to adulthood” (p168) in line with existing knowledge about youth development. Support in particular should not be time limited, and should seek to ensure young people’s health and wellbeing, access to income and education, life skills and social networks and engagement in ‘meaningful activity’.

Key informants in this study were also positive about the capacity of Housing First models to be developed as part of a better response to youth homelessness, seeing it as a response best suited to a particular and small subgroup of young people with complex needs:

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<sup>105</sup> See Bretherton and Pleace (2015) for a recent evaluation of 9 Housing First projects in England and Johnsen (2013) for an evaluation of Turning Point Scotland’s Housing First project in Glasgow. Turning Point Scotland also run Housing First projects in Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire. DePaul Ireland also run a Housing First project in Belfast, Northern Ireland (see <http://www.depaulireland.org/our-services/services-on-the-map/northern-ireland/housing-first/>)..

*“Housing First... [is] definitely an option that’s worth promoting for some young people... one size does not fit all... this can be a useful solution for a small sub set with multiple/complex needs whose needs are not going to be met in shared provision – and the risk of eviction/failure is high”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

*“I’m a big fan of Housing First... I think we could do with a lot more Housing First in the UK... for me, it’s [for] that group that... need those intensive interventions where you do have the low threshold requirements in terms of going in and where your expectations when people are in are going to be necessarily very low because it’s all about keeping people there.”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)

Key informants tended to see most young people as having quite distinct needs as compared to the traditional target groups of the Housing First model, and were thus more open to models that incorporate an emphasis on progression towards independent living:

*“some young people, particularly young people with complex needs actually who cannot manage in the supported accommodation world, Housing First is a great model... but there’s another whole group of young people who are like many other young people, for example young people who go to university; if they were in their own place too quickly they probably wouldn’t thrive very well. They need to practice and to share and to get ready for their own place. That’s quite a normal thing; most of us did that.”* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

*“Housing First, as I understand it, is aimed at people who have been difficult to house and sustain tenancies. Young people aren’t often in that situation because they are often coming at it from their first tenancy point of view, and so their support needs are... different... you are less likely to need help with the chaotic elements and more likely to need help... how you switch on a washing machine and this is how often you really need to use it’.”* (Voluntary sector representative, Scotland)

It was additionally suggested that young homeless people require support that is dually focused on securing them accommodation and employment. Their needs may therefore be different from the older chronically homeless group usually targeted by Housing First whom are typically much further away from the labour market.

Participants in the study were also hopeful that the seven projects supported through the DCLG/Cabinet Office Fair Chance Fund (see chapter 2) would generate important learning regarding ‘what works’ for homeless young people with the most complex needs, albeit that these projects only cover seven areas leaving gaps in provision for this group across much of the UK<sup>106</sup>. It should also be noted that there was some concern that the group of young people targeted by the Fund<sup>107</sup> were too narrowly defined. One key informant described the

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<sup>106</sup> Details of the areas in which Fair Chance programmes are underway can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/23-million-to-help-homeless-turn-around-their-lives>

<sup>107</sup> 18-24 year olds defined under the statutory homelessness system as homeless but not in priority need, who are not in employment education or training and who are not able to be accommodated in supporting housing due to e.g. previous eviction, security issues (e.g. serious offending histories), having complex needs (substance misuse, significant mental health issues, learning disability or personality disorders) but who do not reach the threshold for adult social care services.

Fund as targeting only those with “extreme levels of need” rather than a somewhat broader group of young homeless people with difficult backgrounds and complex needs.

### Accommodation for those with low support needs

In addition to this gap in provision for those with complex needs, key informants noted that provision for young people with low/no support needs was also insufficient:

*“there're gaps for the most complex but there're also gaps for those who are the least complex and just actually, you know, want to get into further education or want to take a job... the income levels of young people when they are working, if they're an apprentice or if they're minimum wage as a young person, or entry level jobs even, then their ability to pay a rent of a reasonable place is very challenged, so there is also that gap.”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England)

*“I think there're some very specific initiatives that need to focus around a highly complex group of young people with multiple needs... that's a very small group of people but they need a lot of investment... But I think in terms of making the more significant impact, it has to be with that lower level of need group where you have to set up situations of light touch support... people can not get sucked into being clients of homelessness organisations but can be given the right assistance, light touch interventions, that they can live normal lives and no longer have to come and see us for any support because they can get their lives back on track.”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)

Participants saw a need for high-quality transitional support that is focused on swiftly ‘up skilling’ young people to be able to move on to independent living. One described this an “investment approach to young people... an intense period where you can really work with the young person to help them develop those life skills, move into that kind of education, training, employment, whatever they need to do... it’s recognising that during that period of – there’s a transitional period that they need a lot more support” (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England).

Though there were some concerns about young people being moved through supported accommodation projects too swiftly, that is, before this up-skilling was able to take place leaving them at risk of repeat homelessness following a failed independent tenancy, considerably more concern surrounded the risks of young people being forced to stay in supported accommodation for long periods of time. This chimes with existing research about the delays young people face in seeking to move out of supported accommodation due to the lack of suitable housing to move on to. In a 2014 survey of over 300 supported accommodation scheme residents, 80% reported being anxious about being able to find somewhere to live when they were ready to move on, with over half (56%) feeling they were currently ready but unable to do so (YMCA, 2015a). Key informants who participated in this study emphasised the negative consequences associated with long stays in supported accommodation, including negative peer pressure and ‘institutionalisation’:

*“there are care leavers that come through that don't have as high support needs, that there is no way they should have gone through the hostels and they need to be able to have access to lower support immediately... it can sometimes have a negative effect of taking that person through peer pressure into situations that they wouldn't have*

*needed to go into had it been a different resource... there are people with increasingly complex and high needs in those projects and there is a need for a kind of middle ground below that, but [...not] complete independence” (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)*

*“the cost of move on accommodation it's prohibitive and so that creates a log jam in the system and means that young people are more likely to be institutionalised, more likely to require longer-term supported accommodation because there is not a suitable priced accommodation move on option” (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)*

Young people getting ‘stuck’ in supported accommodation is also seen as problematic in that residents who are in employment will have a large proportion of their earned income absorbed by the high rents in such accommodation, potentially disincentivising young people from entering work. This underpinned some key informants’ frustration with the provision of supported accommodation as the core response to youth homelessness: “we can’t keep creating specialist accommodation for people for ever and a day. Get people back into the real world” (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London). This issue has been acknowledged for some time now (Quilgars et al, 2008) but is considered by some organisations working with young people to be worsening (YMCA, 2015a)<sup>108</sup>.

In this context, the development of decent, well-managed accommodation that is affordable in relation to young people’s often low earned incomes was seen as absolutely essential. It was acknowledged that in many parts of the country, given the low wages young people often receive, including the very low apprenticeship wage<sup>109</sup>, and the escalation of rent levels, achieving affordability requires developing subsidised/below market rent levels for young people<sup>110</sup>. This is particularly relevant in light of plans to remove some young people’s entitlement to Housing Benefit and the exclusion of under 25 year olds from the new National Living Wage (see chapter 2). It is hoped that the Platform for Life programme<sup>111</sup> will contribute to the development of such accommodation options (see chapter 2), though there is concern within the sector that the ‘affordable rent’ levels (of up to 80% of market rent) at which Platform for Life rents will be set may still be out of reach for some low income households (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015b). A number of approaches to and models of providing such genuinely affordable accommodation for young people received support from key informants.

Developing models that offer ‘light touch’ support and housing management was also seen to be part of the required response, given the low support needs of the young people targeted. Such an approach would offer some oversight but avoid the costs (and work disincentive effects) of higher support provision:

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<sup>108</sup> Universal Credit aims to improve work incentives faced by young people (see chapter 2).

<sup>109</sup> In 2014/15, apprentices aged 16 to 18 and those aged 19 or over who are in their first year were subject to a minimum wage of £2.73 per hour. All other apprentices are entitled to the National Minimum Wage for their age. See <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>

<sup>110</sup> And has sparked calls for the introduction of rent control measures from some quarters. For example see <http://blog.shelter.org.uk/2014/02/are-rent-caps-the-answer/>

<sup>111</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-expanding-support-to-beat-homelessness>

*"I think it's thinking about... low cost housing for people so that they actually don't end up with massive like weekly rentals because of the cost of supported accommodation, and I think that's the trap often that people end up in is that they've got very high weekly rental charges and service charges because they're in high need accommodation that actually maybe they don't need to be in."* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

It should be noted that higher levels of support have been identified as key to the success of sharing schemes (Batty et al, 2015 and see below), with low support models potentially more appropriate when young people live in self-contained accommodation. Several key informants proposed that models that seek to provide property investors with a safe investment over time, but with lower expected rental incomes, hold potential as part of the solution to finding low rent solutions for young people. The Peer Landlords scheme (discussed below) seeks to work with investors to develop such a model, with the aim that tenants are able not only to pay their current rent, but also to save for a deposit to facilitate future moves (Catch 22 et al, 2014).

#### **Box 9: YMCA Y:Cube project**

YMCA's [Y:Cube project](#) offers young people self-contained, affordable, 'starter accommodation' in prefabricated housing units that can be built both quickly and cheaply. One Y:Cube site in Mitcham, South West London offers units to 36 young people at 65% of market rent, with capital costs provided by 'social investors' who are guaranteed a 5% return on their investment.

Another means of achieving low rents are through design and build options that minimise costs, for instance by using prefabricating housing units, an approach pursued in the YMCA Y:Cube project (see box 9). Though such approaches are seen by some as an innovative answer to the housing crisis, there are also concerns about the space and design standards and calls for more permanent solutions to be found (Wainwright, 2014; Garvie, 2015). Another proposed source of appropriate accommodation is former student accommodation, in particular in cities where purpose built student housing is being introduced (Batty et al, 2015). St Basils' Live and Work scheme offers another example of a project seeking to provide genuinely affordable accommodation for young people, in this case linked to apprenticeship opportunities (see box 10).

As regards the PRS, it is clear from key informants and other work (Rugg, 2014) that specific PRS access work (i.e. to recruit landlords offering affordable decent quality tenancies, secure deposits, match sharers where appropriate, and provide in tenancy support) is essential, with key informants in this study seeing the reluctance of landlords to rent to young people (e.g. compared to families) as a key barrier. Social lettings agencies were seen as one means of overcoming such barriers. Such agencies – also known as local lettings agencies – offer a competitively priced lettings service to private landlords to find tenants and manage tenancies. Unlike mainstream letting agents, they are run by charities, housing associations or local authorities on a not-for-profit basis but generate income in order to sustain the service they provide, and target groups who struggle to access PRS accommodation on their own (Crisis, 2011). Smart Move in Northern Ireland<sup>112</sup> offers one

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<sup>112</sup> See <http://www.smartmove-housing.com/>



#### **Box 10: St Basils' Live and Work scheme**

Launched in 2015, the [Live and Work scheme](#) aims to enable young people to live benefit free on an apprenticeship wage. Using a grant from the Empty Homes Community Grant Programme to renovate empty properties in partnership with Sandwell & West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, the scheme offers 27 young apprentices working with the Trust the opportunity to live and work on the site. Rent and service charges are being minimised through an agreement for the Trust to lease the properties to St Basils for free, with a 'whole community approach' used to lever in contributions and support from a range of local partners.

example of a social lettings agency specifically set up to address homelessness (Ellison et al, 2012). Though some key informants saw enduring barriers in social lettings agents being able to recruit private landlords (who may prefer letting to other groups) and/or tenants (who still often prefer to seek more secure social housing tenancies), they were described by one participant as a "key plank of any youth homelessness strategy" (Voluntary sector representative, England). Against this, several participants did emphasise that young people often do not want to live in the private rented sector if avoidable, citing the low quality of PRS accommodation available at SAR rates in some areas, and that some young people "have had really bad experiences and they don't feel safe" (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England). According to these participants, social housing remains an important housing option for young people and should not be 'off the table' (see also McKee and Hoolachan 2015).

Many key informants saw developing sharing options for young people as an absolutely crucial part of the response to youth homelessness:

*"that mix of trying to find affordable housing and to make shared housing models work for young people, I think has to be what we should be trying to do."* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)

*"the skills in sharing are critical. They are going to be critical because there's just not the supply"* (Voluntary sector representative, England).

There was some disagreement regarding whether this was a practical necessity given the shortage of housing supply or whether it was in fact desirable regardless of the context to develop sharing options for young people:

*"I think there's no chance and I don't even think we should want to return to a time where routinely young people are given self-contained flats because I don't think that works either."* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)

*"young people often say they want their own place but when they get it, they're quite lonely. So it's this idea of progression and what's normal for a lot of young people is to share for a bit and just socialise and to make friends and do things together and then work towards their own accommodation when they can properly afford it"* (Voluntary sector representative, England)

These stakeholders questioned the appropriateness of young people moving into self-contained accommodation immediately, seeing a progressing pathway through sharing and then into independent accommodation as not only practical but desirable. Other stakeholders disagreed, and in particular those outside of London, in that they were less comfortable with sharing becoming the default/standard offer available for young people:

*“sharing, it's definitely an option and it works really well for some young people. It's kind of being pushed as the option a bit, I think, and in London and in the south that may well be the case. That's not the case [outside of London]. There is still the possibility and a lot of our young people still go through into one bed flats... You ask our young people, particularly if they've been through supported accommodation, they want their own flat. So we can say, 'You're not going to get it and it's not there.' But let's not pretend that's what they want. Some of them do. Some of them have got a friend and they want to share and they don't want to be on their own and there are young people where it's absolutely the best option. But I would be always wary of just because the system is saying that's what they should have and that's the only offer and then you end up developing nothing but that”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England)

It would seem fair to conclude that both sharing and self-contained accommodation options should, where possible, be developed for young people, with likely variations across different areas and housing market contexts.

Though efforts to develop sharing models in the private sector have tended to be the focus (Batty et al, 2015), not least as a means of managing the effects of the Shared Accommodation Rate and its extension to 25-34 year olds, key informants in this study also saw scope to develop sharing options in social tenancies, with some arguing that the orientation of social landlords is particularly well suited to providing support to young people in shared tenancies. There was concern from others that social landlords' offer to young people is increasingly limited in a context where welfare reform is pushing down young people's incomes and thus what they can afford to pay in rent. One Welsh key informant commented:

*“...housing associations doing a financial capability assessment and saying that that young person isn't in a position to afford this tenancy when really where else are they going to go, you know? So we have seen in Wales recently a percentage of, not just in youth homelessness, but the properties let through housing associations going to people who are homeless decreasing.”* (Local Government representative, Wales)

Social rented sector sharing schemes may offer one means of social landlords developing their offer to young people, particularly in areas where the 'Bedroom Tax' prevents people from taking up larger properties.

The Crisis Sharing Solutions scheme and associated evaluation (Batty et al, 2015) offer useful guidance, identifying a range of different sharing models that can be pursued. The Peer Landlords Scheme (see box 11), for example, gained particular support from key informants in this study because it offers affordable housing, with support, in a non-institutional setting:



*“you walk into a normal shared house with somebody sitting at the kitchen table who appears to be entirely normal because they are. It's not like going round a hostel where you can expect something to kick off.”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)

Lodging was also identified by key informants as another form of shared accommodation for young people. In their evaluation of the Crisis Sharing Solutions programme, Batty et al (2015) identify particular scope for owner occupiers to take lodgers. Though lodging offers less secure accommodation than some alternatives, it is seen to have some potential as part of the set of housing options available to young people. Key informants did identify a gap in relation to developing lodging models that are appropriate and safe:

*“in a time when we are looking at a paucity of affordable accommodation, people being able to become a lodger in someone's home in a safe and supportive way I think is a really important model”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

#### **Box 11: The Peer Landlords Scheme**

The Peer Landlord model is being piloted by Thames Reach and Catch22, supported by Commonweal Housing with financial support from Bridges Ventures, Esmée Fairburn Foundation and Trust for London. The scheme offers accommodation for up to 39 single people across 13 houses and targets people who are over 18, have experienced or are at risk of homelessness, have low support needs and are in employment or education or 'work ready'. Within each house, support is provided by a 'Peer Landlord' – one of the tenants whom is given support and incentives to provide “informal, positive, role-model peer support to other tenants in a supportive housing arrangement” (Catch 22 et al, 2014, p7). The aim is that the subsidised rent level (see above) enables tenants to save and move on to their own accommodation.

An interim evaluation of the scheme, which has so far housed around 50 tenants, indicated that both Peer Landlords and other tenants valued the quality of accommodation combined with relatively low rent offered by the scheme, in addition to the opportunity to develop independent living skills and save money. The evaluators concluded that “the model shows promise in providing an alternative to traditional supported housing and in making sharing a positive and sustainable option for suitable tenants and Peer Landlords” (p9). The results of the full evaluation are due to be published in late 2015/early 2016.

Such approaches could range from 'traditional lodgings' for young people with no support needs to Supported Lodgings. Discussed above as a potential model to develop for young people with high support needs, the Supported Lodgings model is also appropriate for those with lower support requirements and generally considered to be a cost-effective model of supported accommodation in comparison to alternatives (CLG, 2008).

Batty et al (2015) note that establishing traditional arrangements requires “a significant investment of time and effort” (p25). They suggest that a number of factors enable the successful use of lodging, including: setting up local partnerships to promote lodging; providing support to lodgers and hosts; ensuring the use of fair lodging agreements and a

clear understanding of the impact of having a lodger on the hosts finances (e.g. benefit claims). There would thus appear to be scope for traditional lodgings schemes for older young people with low/no support needs could be developed alongside Supported Lodgings schemes and/or by social lettings agencies/PRS Access Schemes in some areas.

Cutting across these different models of sharing, Batty et al (2015) identify a range of factors required to make sharing work:

- sourcing an appropriate supply of suitable accommodation, which is likely to vary between local areas/housing markets;
- managing shared tenancies, including ensuring the use of appropriate tenancy agreements, property management, and assessing the suitability of prospective tenants;
- ‘buddying up’/matching prospective sharers, which was also seen as an important strategy by key informants who participated in this study, albeit that it was seen to carry risk for organisations who match young people who go on to have tenancy problems;
- supporting sharing tenants to ensure tenancy sustainment was seen to be an essential element of successful schemes;
- engaging and incentivising landlords;
- developing local partnerships to secure client referrals.

In addition, the promotion of ‘cultures of sharing’ was seen as a feature of successful sharing schemes (Batty et al, 2015). This was seen to be a particular challenge outside of London where sharing is less culturally accepted:

*“outside of London... there is a really big education piece for us in the sector with young people about adjusting expectations, so the reality that young people are going to have to live in houses of multiple occupation and that shared accommodation is going to be the new normal, is quite a task so we put quite a lot of effort into that”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide).

Sharing cultures are also likely to be better established among some groups of young people, for example, those with experience in student accommodation at university and may be harder to facilitate among young people without such experiences and with a different set of expectations about the transition to adulthood and independent living.

## Employment

The changing context of youth homelessness described in this report – namely, that young people now face high rents, low wages and cuts to their welfare entitlements – requires a fundamental rethink of the relationship between youth homelessness services and interventions focused on youth unemployment and employability. As St Basils (2015) argue:

*“Most young people will only be able to afford to live independently if they are in employment or in work based training unless they have additional financial support from their own parents/family or the local authority as a ‘corporate parent’”* (p14).

The necessity of helping young homeless people into employment, not only accommodation, is underlined by existing evidence about the poor long-term financial prospects of people

who experience homelessness. In a study of 237 formerly homeless people in England five years following their resettlement, Crane et al (2015) reported particular stark outcomes regarding the financial circumstances of young people in particular: 14% of 20-24 year olds had rent arrears of £1,000 or more five years following resettlement, with 9% under threat of eviction. Further to this, a third of this age group had debts at the time of resettlement, rising to 86% five years later (Crane et al, 2015). Based on a review of the links between homelessness and poverty – and of interventions aiming to alleviate the poverty of those who experience homelessness – Johnsen and Watts (2014) point to the lack of success of homelessness interventions in tackling the long-term experiences of poverty among those who have experienced homelessness<sup>113</sup> and argue that the homelessness sector should:

*“redirect its focus from ‘income maximisation’, often reflected in a preoccupation with ensuring that all benefits to which individuals are entitled are being received, to a more ambitious emphasis on poverty alleviation. This would direct attention to improving the accessibility of sufficiently well paid work or out of work benefits and/or strengthening of the wider welfare safety net” (p. iv)*

Given the continuing restrictions on the welfare entitlements of young people under the welfare reform programme of the previous and current Westminster government, the role of employment in this equation is only set to increase.

In response to this increasingly challenging context, key informants identified an imperative to align and integrate youth homelessness and youth employment focused services and interventions:

*“I think it's an absolute moral obligation on local authorities as commissions and providers.... to get young people as ready as possible for work and that's a really, really hard challenge... it's possible – there are many examples of providers doing very purposeful work with young people preparing them for employment – but for other providers and their commissioners it will require a huge shift in what they've been doing” (Voluntary sector representative, England)*

*“the initiatives that help around people not lurching into homelessness and rough sleeping... [are] the ones that support people to maintain a job and give people the opportunity of moving into accommodation where the rent is decent and subsidised” (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)*

*“If we can get young people into employment and increase their skills they're more likely to retain a home when they get it.” (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)*

There were some signs that this shift had already begun. According to one statutory sector key informant:

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<sup>113</sup> The evidence base on this point is unfortunately weak, in part due to difficulties tracking service users after they have gained employment and/or stopped using homelessness support services (Johnsen and Watts, 2014). Centrepoin's Youth Homelessness Databank aims to make some contribution here by developing a web based tool or mobile app to better understand the longer term outcomes for young people who have experienced homelessness (see <http://centrepoin.org.uk/google>).

*“Our work used to be around social inclusion and... trying to get young people who are isolated involved in their communities. The aim is now getting young people involved in their communities with a view to moving into work, or training. So we do a lot less of the kind of nice to do, meet and have a positive activity and you feel happy about where you live. It's now thinking about how you're going to keep living where you live and what you're going to do in the future.”* (Local authority respondent, North of England).

Three key components to improving the employment offer to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness were identified in this study: getting young people ‘work ready’; engaging employers and other partners; and ensuring in-work progression for homeless and formerly homeless young people.

Before these are discussed further, it should be noted that the increasingly complex needs of young people experiencing homelessness (see chapter 4) provides a particular challenge in ensuring that this group are work ready wherever possible. While for most young people experiencing homelessness focussing on their employability is likely to be of central importance in address their homelessness, broader wellbeing and future prospects, for the subset of young homeless people with the most complex needs, a heavy focus on entering paid work may be misguided, with a more realistic aim being to address their housing, health and social integration needs first. St Basils’ Boost programme, for instance, seeks to work with young people with the most complex needs through intensive tailored support and Mental Skills Training (see below), and aims to provide them with encouragement, help and motivation to guide them in their transition towards independence<sup>114</sup>.

### Getting young people work ready

Key informants identified a number of ways in which youth homelessness organisations can help get their service users closer to employment. First, those in the sector saw a case for adopting an asset-based approach within homelessness services (see also St Basils, 2015 and YMCA England, 2015c), that focuses on young people’s strengths and interests, to engage them in learning, training and employment:

*“I think you need to treat every single one of them as individuals. You need to really have a strength based approach. You need to really understand what their engagement issues are, what are their interests, what are their talents, what are their strengths. You need to be able to wrap around that and give them access to learning”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England)

*“if you were to ask me what works it's that, it's that holistic support and the asset based approach, the working with talent, potential and aspiration rather than deficit and lack.”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

The direction of reforms to out of work benefits for young people appears to be going in a somewhat different direction, however, with increasing emphasis placed on compliance with conditions. Under Jobseekers’ Allowance, young people are at disproportionate risk of being sanctioned for non-compliance than older age groups (Watts et al, 2014), with the Youth Obligation likely to further intensify the conditionality faced by 18-21 year olds from April

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<sup>114</sup> See <http://www.stbasils.org.uk/how-we-help/our-services/lsw/>

2017 (chapter 2). The extent to which this emphasis on conditionality is balanced with support tailored to young people's particular interests and skills and an emphasis on support and motivation is thus an important question, in particular in light of the association between conditionality/sanctions and food/fuel poverty, survival crime, family/relationship tensions, mental and physical health problems, debt and disengagement with the system (Watts et al, 2014; Beatty et al, 2015; Fitzpatrick et al, 2015a).

Those in the sector also saw work-related experiences – with associated support and feedback – as an important part of the offer youth homelessness organisations can offer to young people, in order to develop confidence in entering a work environment, foster motivation and a clarify the expectations of employers:

*“work experience - because that is what young people really need the ones who come to us. They haven't got that. They've never had it from their parents. Basic things like being on time, not looking at your phone all the time. So there's that understanding and then there's actually those young people who are - it's nine o'clock but they think it's okay to walk in at ten and also it's okay to look at your phone all day and it's not. So, again just those employability skills which they've never seen at home.”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)

*“there need to be models of training, education and employment support that recognise the distance that people need to travel, so the fact that they do need to emotionally regulate first, that they do need to be able to build up the ability to... have a routine, that they do need to make further steps than the current programmes do.”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, South of England)

#### **Box 12: Getting young homeless people work-ready**

The [Thames Reach Employment Academy](#), South London works with the long-term unemployed to develop their skills and confidence to find jobs, including through a number of social enterprises, which offer work experience to formerly homeless clients (of all ages). Key to the model is development of close links with employers across London and the provision of in-work support. Thames Reach has also championed service user employment within the homelessness sector, with 22% of the organisations' own employees having experienced homelessness themselves. It aims to promote this model through [the GROW scheme](#), which offers advice and guidance to homelessness organisations interested in adopting the same approach.

The [Mental Skills Training Scheme](#), developed by St Basils in partnership with the School of Sport, Exercises and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Birmingham, offers another model of helping young people get 'work-ready', by drawing on the approaches used by sports men/women to achieve positive results. A combination of workshop learning and individual and team challenges are used to develop young people's capacity to: think positively, overcome barriers, be motivated and resilient to setbacks in pursuing their education, and set training and employment related goals.

*“a lot of our early training programmes are all about helping people to work with other people, to do basic training around health and safety but to make sure people are getting up in the morning and do a full day's work and are committed to work rather than being very skilled.”* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)

Key informants saw some potential for the creation of such opportunities within homelessness organisations themselves in cases where young people lack the confidence/skills to go straight into a work environment (see box 12). Young people's involvement in social enterprises - that is, businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested to support those aims - was also seen as a means to develop their employability skills. Available evidence on the capacity of social enterprises as a route to employment for homeless people is limited, but suggests that they have potential to help some homeless people develop work experience, skills and qualifications, and promote 'social and emotional' capabilities (e.g. self-confidence and self-respect) (Tanekenov, 2013). According to Tanekenov (2013), such positive outcomes are more likely achieved by social enterprises with an overtly 'social' rather than 'business' focus. Social enterprises however appear to have little direct impact on the financial situation of those involved (who are often volunteers rather than paid employees) and may be ill suited to the specific needs of homeless people with complex needs (Teasdale, 2010; Tanekenov, 2013 and see Johnsen and Watts, 2014 for a summary). Several social enterprises were mentioned as offering positive examples of this kind of approach (see box 13).

#### **Box 13: Social enterprises**

The [Calman Trust](#) offer young people (from the general population rather than those with experiences of homelessness) aged 14-25 support, training and employment in their café, printing service and handmade toiletries company in the Inverness area of Scotland.

[Vi-Ability](#) offer training, work experience and qualifications in commercial sports management to people of all ages to help support community sports clubs around the UK.

#### **Engaging employers**

Engaging employers and other local partners (e.g. Job Centres and third-sector organisations) was endorsed as a key strategy by those in the sector as a means of improving young people's employment chances, both in order to provide work experience, 'tasters' and placements, and in order to broker relationships that lead to job opportunities for young people.

There was a particularly strong emphasis on youth homelessness organisations pro-actively engaging local employers from the private sector. Successful engagement was largely seen to depend on being proactive in approaching relevant employers and on offers of support:

*“What we need are employers to get on board a bit more. As the organisations working with homeless young people what we need to be saying is 'We will support you employer if you take on this young person for training, work experience whatever it is. We will support you to do it because we know it's not easy. We know you've got a business to run. You're not a charity. We are'. So we need to have these relationships with employers as organisations and say 'Take on this young person and we will*



*provide a buddy from our end and if you can provide a work buddy, mentor and then let's just see how it goes'.*" (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, England)

*"usually we find if you go to the employers they actually really want to be engaged. But the trouble for them is they're under pressure, they need ready for work young people. Now a lot of the young people that come in through our service are not ready for work or they think they might be and then they go in and then they struggle or they don't turn up or something's happened and they have a crisis and all this. So you have to really offer the employer something as well to support them"* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England)

Volunteer job-coaches or job-buddies (a form of mentoring) recruited and trained by third-sector organisations were seen as one effective means of offering out of work young people, new employees<sup>115</sup> and their employer support, with such a service offered by Business in the Community and the Thames Reach employment academy<sup>116</sup>. A 2014 study of the employment outcomes of homeless people participating in Business in the Community's 'Ready for Work' programme showed a significant positive relationship between individual job coaching and both gaining and sustaining employment, a relationship that was most marked among 18-24 year old participants in the programme (Hoven et al, 2014). Another approach adopted by Thames Reach has been to formalise links with employers through a Job Broker services that links local employers with work-ready formerly homeless people<sup>117</sup>. According to one key informant, some local authorities are currently developing "bridging support for employers" that will offer employment support to young people within organisations that will seek to recognise "the difference about each young person and where they're at and what some of their challenges might be and working alongside that and having easements that might take that into account" (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, England).

### **In-work support**

Given evidence cited above regarding the poor long-term outcomes experienced by formerly homeless young people, this emphasis on in-work support and progression is particularly important. This is especially the case given concerns outlined earlier regarding the increasingly insecure and low-paid work opportunities available to young people. In-work support was thus seen not only to offer employers an incentive to engage with this group (and reduce the cost/time associated with doing so), but as a means of improving the long-term prospects of young people who have experienced homelessness. The practical advice job coaches or buddies can offer was described as particularly valuable:

*"it is about how you can increase your skills but also how you need to behave towards people in the hierarchy, for example. What do you do to show your boss that you're doing a good job? How do you position yourself to be given the next opportunity of progression within the company, that kind of stuff, which for people who are outside*

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<sup>115</sup> Job coaches can be linked with coachees while they are looking for work or once they have entered employment. In the latter case, they may work for the same or a different employer.

<sup>116</sup> See <http://www.employmentacademy.org.uk/> and <http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/ready-work/get-involved/job-coaching>

<sup>117</sup> See <http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/employment-and-resettlement/job-broker-service/>



*the world of work and have been for years, they don't know how to do that? They don't know what that good behaviour involves... if we can get people beyond the first poorly paid entry-level jobs, then I think that's how the housing situation gets resolved"* (Senior manager, single homelessness service provider, London)

Employers and youth homelessness organisations thus have the potential to play an important combined role in shifting the labour market context facing young people, by offering work-experience, secure and good quality work opportunities and in-work support that can maximise young people's capacity to enter, retain and progress in work.

## **Social networks**

The breakdown and attrition of young people's relationships with friends and family has historically – and continues to be – a primary driver of youth homelessness. Even where this is not the primary cause of homelessness, available evidence suggests that young homeless people are more likely to have experienced problematic relationships (parental conflict, domestic abuse in the family home, bullying, abuse) than other young people (see chapter 4). Moreover, homelessness is commonly understood in and of itself to be an isolating experience that can dislocate people from their social networks still further. If then 'positive' social capital is understood as a 'safety net' protecting those in challenging circumstances from experiencing homelessness (Shinn, 2007), improving, growing and/or strengthening the social networks of young people at risk of or with past experience of homelessness may help prevent/alleviate homelessness, and support other positive outcomes (e.g. engagement in education and/or employment) (Barker, 2012; Tabner, 2013).

Drawing on a three-year research programme with Scottish local authorities, Tabner (2013) proposes the adoption of a 'networks approach' to youth homelessness which acknowledges "the benefits derived from each relationship within an individual's network and the social capital they derive from these relationships" and seeks to address homelessness by developing "informal and formal support networks as part of a holistic and sustainable care package" (Tabner, 2013, p4). There was support for a move towards such an approach among key informants participating in this study, with several participants identifying a gap in youth homelessness organisations efforts to improve the social networks of the young people they work with. One participant endorsed a rebalancing of emphasis in the supported accommodation sector from inward facing service management, to outward facing community engagement:

*"there's too much time spent managing the accommodation rather than... going out in to the community and making sure that the people in the hostel and living out in the community are given opportunities to move on in their lives... There's a lot of work we can do while someone's in the hostel. So maybe get them linked in with people who, you know, depending on what they like doing, if they've got an interest or - could you get them linked in to a football club to work on football in the community... So when they come out they have more than just an empty flat to go in to. This is what I think is crucial because... what I've seen all so often is people who just become lonely and isolated and end up getting back in to circles of people with drugs and things, whatever it is, and end up going backwards again"* (Local Government representative, Wales)

Another key informant identified the six months following resettlement from a supported accommodation project as particularly crucial in sustainably resolving their homelessness, seeing a lack of social support and social networks as a key risk factor for repeat homelessness:

*“there's a critical period, about three to six months after a young person settles from a [supported accommodation project], where the initial euphoria of getting their own place, you know, that's all out of the way. They're now in to the whole kind of drudgery of the daily grind of going to work and coming back home and very frequently they live by themselves, might feel a bit isolated. You know, they go through a critical period between three and six months after they've left the [supported accommodation project] where if they don't get that support at that time their tenancy will fail.”* (Senior manager, youth homelessness service provider, UK-wide)

As the previous quote illustrates, finding opportunities for young people to develop informal social networks in the local community was seen as one means of addressing this gap. In addition, some key informants argued that formal floating/in tenancy support should be available for a sufficiently long period post-resettlement to ensure young people are not isolated in their new circumstances, with concerns that cuts to housing related support/Supporting People budgets are forcing support agencies to shorten the period of time for which such support is offered (if it is available at all).

In addition to these informal and formal modes of social support – and mediation (see above) – mentoring and befriending were also seen by some key informants to offer a means of improving the social networks of young people during and/or following homelessness (see also Shelter, 2006; Tabner, 2013). Mentoring and befriending are distinguished by mentoring's 'goal oriented' focus and attempt to support the mentee in their “interests, abilities and aspirations and in line with the purposes and objectives of the mentoring agency” (Tabner, 2013, p26). Befriending, by contrast, is less focused on goals and more focused on “offering emotional support and companionship” (Shelter, 2006, p5), with both attempting to achieve positive outcomes by creating a supportive relationship between two people.

#### **Box 14: The Rock Trust's Compass project**

The [Rock Trust's Compass project](#) offer young people with a history of being looked after, offending and/or homelessness medium term adaptive support around 4 issues:

- moving on to a sustained tenancy;
- managing finances;
- entering employment, education or training; and
- becoming confident and able to interact positively with others by developing meaningful relationships.

Support is offered via one to one work with key workers combined with a drop in service, outreach work, group work, mediation and optional mentoring. Young people can be assigned a trained volunteer mentor to help them address insecurities, develop social skills, build confidence and self-esteem and working towards personal goals.

Mentoring schemes can vary on a number of dimensions: mentors can be peers (with similar experiences) or non-peers (who can act as a 'role model'), paid or volunteers, mentor for varying lengths of time and be standalone or part of a broader set of interventions. The evidence base on the effectiveness of mentoring is insufficient to draw robust conclusions, with available evidence offering mixed results (Shelter, 2006; MoJ, 2013). Nevertheless, mentees often report how much they value their relationships with mentors, with organisations working with homeless people seeing clear benefit and developing best practice guidance in this area (Tabner, 2013; Scottish Social Networks, 2010). Participants in this study too saw mentoring as a potentially useful component in responses to homelessness, and as potentially more desirable than befriending given its emphasis on setting and meeting goals, and integrating young people into their own community. Participants also emphasised the need for mentors to be trained, understand boundaries and be well matched with mentees (though some participants were supporting of a peer mentoring model, others were wary of the particular sensitivity required in matching peer mentors).

Given evidence that the majority of people experiencing homelessness have access to the internet (often via a smart phone) (Lemos and Frankenburg, 2015) some thought could be given to the role of online apps, website and social media can play in promoting the positive social networks of young people experiencing, at risk of or formerly homelessness, in addition to the traditional face-to-face methods that have been discussed here<sup>118</sup>.

The social networks agenda in relation to youth homelessness appears to be particularly well developed in Scotland<sup>119</sup> (see Stenhouse, 2005; Tabner, 2013; Scottish Social Networks, 2010). The Rock Trust, an Edinburgh-based youth homelessness organisation, champions such an approach and delivers training through the Scottish Social Networks Forum<sup>120</sup> on behalf of the Scottish Government. The Forum aims to raise awareness of the need for positive social networks among socially excluded groups and assist local authorities and homelessness projects to assess and support individuals' social networks, for instance, through the development of befriending, mentoring and mediation services.

## Key points

- School-based interventions informing young people about homelessness and (more broadly) their housing options, including peer education models and relationship management workshops, have been developed by a range of youth homelessness organisations, albeit that geographic coverage and take-up by schools is uneven. Despite limited evidencing regarding the effectiveness of such programmes – and difficulties generating it – there was support for increasing access to them, particularly in disadvantaged areas with high rates of youth homelessness.

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<sup>118</sup> Centrepoin's Youth Homelessness Databank may contribute to this agenda. The web/mobile app being developed by the Databank team aims to enable young people who have experienced homelessness to share stories with each other and society (see <http://centrepoin.org.uk/google>).

<sup>119</sup> This is likely to reflect the high profile given to the importance of homeless people's social networks in the Homelessness Task Force's final report in 2002. The Homelessness Task force was convened in 1999 and its two reports informed substantial reform of the statutory homelessness system in Scotland.

<sup>120</sup> See <http://www.rocktrust.org/index.php/projects/scottish-social-networks-2/>

- Opportunities to identify those at risk of homelessness and signpost them to early preventative help could be better utilised given clear evidence about the 'risk factors' associated with youth homelessness. Active roles in this might valuably be played by a range of institutions, including: schools, colleges, health service providers, youth clubs and other youth services, Job Centres and the police. Local authorities and voluntary organisations are well placed to promote joint working around early identification. There is particular support for targeting early help at care leavers, young offenders and young people in particularly disadvantaged/deprived areas.
- Family mediation is now widely seen to be a core element of youth homelessness provision, not only as a means to prevent homelessness, but also to ensure that moves out of the family home are planned and enable young people to maintain positive relationships with their family insofar as possible. There is particular support for mediation offered to young people (including under 16 year olds) and their families before crisis is reached, and for it to be provided by specialist mediators. Current provision is insufficient in some areas and there is seen to be a need to improve the uptake of mediation services by young people and their families.
- Holistic, family-focused interventions that offer practical and emotional support and help with parenting skills for young people's parents/carers were identified as a key gap in youth homelessness provision. Such whole-family provision has the potential to ease the pressures on struggling families and support a smoother transition to independence for young people.
- There is support for greater provision of good quality and safe emergency accommodation that offers flexible respite and 'time out' to struggling families, in combination with mediation and family support. Non-institutional emergency accommodation that provides young people with a room in a private 'community host's' home (e.g. Nightstop) is seen to be a particularly promising approach, though there is a lack of evidence on the relative advantages of different forms of provision.
- A particular gap in provision was identified for young homeless people with complex needs who require high levels of support. High quality, small-scale supported accommodation projects were seen as part of the required response for this group, with Supported Lodgings, which offer a room in a private home with trained hosts and support from professionals, also seen to offer an effective model for some young people. The 'Housing First' model, in which homeless people move directly into 'normal' (scatter-site) housing on permanent tenancies and are provided with intensive, flexible and non-time limited support was also seen to be a promising model for young people with the most complex issues, albeit that it may require adaptation to the specific needs of young people.
- Psychologically informed approaches are increasingly seen as essential in the youth homelessness sector, not least given the shifting profile and support needs of young people using services. 'Psychologically Informed Environments' are consciously designed to take into account the psychological and emotional needs of service users and are now accepted as offering a positive model in working with homeless people who often have experiences of trauma. A small number of youth homelessness organisations in England have or are in the process of adopting such approaches.

- Supported accommodation that provides high quality, safe, transitional support for young people, fostering independent living skills and linking young people to employment, education and training opportunities are a highly valued area of provision. Given concerns regarding the potentially negative consequences of some hostel-type congregate accommodation models (particularly negative peer pressure, 'institutionalisation', the loss of independent living skills; and work disincentive effects), better evidence on the kinds of supported accommodation models that minimise or avoid these effects would be particularly useful.
- The development of longer-term accommodation options that are affordable for young people on a low income is seen to be absolutely essential. Offering light touch support in accommodation projects; shared accommodation models; design and build options that minimise the costs of new accommodation; repurposing of former student accommodation and/or the refurbishment of empty properties are all seen as offering means to develop lower cost housing for young people.
- The alignment and integration of youth homelessness and employment-focused services is seen to be increasingly critical. Three key routes to improving the employment offer to young homeless people were identified: getting young people 'work ready' through training and skills programmes and work experience; engaging and supporting employers to enable them to offer employment opportunities to young people with experience of homelessness; and encouraging employment and earnings progression for (formerly) homeless young people through in-work support.
- Supporting young people who have experienced homelessness to develop positive social networks (e.g. through mentoring schemes) is seen as another means to support resettlement, improve young people's wellbeing, and reduce the risk of repeat homelessness. A 'social networks approach' to youth homelessness is particularly well developed in Scotland.

## 6. Conclusion

There have been a number of positive policy developments relevant to youth homelessness in the UK since publication of the last national review in 2008 (Quilgars et al, 2008). Notably, the Southwark Judgement has improved responses to homelessness among 16/17 year olds. Prevention-focused 'housing options' approaches now operate in local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland, employing a range of tools to help young people stay in the family home or, where necessary, secure alternative accommodation without becoming homeless. The recently introduced duty on Welsh local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness will be of particular interest to stakeholders in other UK nations, particularly in light of continuing concerns about young people (and other groups) facing 'gatekeeping' when seeking help from their local authority. England has seen investment in specific funds that aim to develop accommodation options for young homeless people and the Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway now informs the development of youth homelessness services in over half of local authorities. In Scotland, virtually all homeless young people are now entitled to rehousing by their local authority, with a parliamentary inquiry into youth homelessness prevention ensuring continued monitoring and accountability in this area. Each of the UK nations has introduced extensions to corporate parenting duties. These reforms have gone furthest in Scotland where it is hoped they will ensure that care leavers never have to rely on the statutory homelessness system to find accommodation. The past seven years have thus seen considerable divergence in approaches to homelessness between the UK nations, a development that will offer substantial insights in the coming years regarding the most effective policies in preventing and tackling youth homelessness.

These positive developments have taken place in extremely challenging wider macroeconomic and social policy contexts. The fallout from the post-2007 recession continues to impact the labour market opportunities of young people. Youth unemployment is three times the overall unemployment rate and young people in work are often on low pay and insecure contracts. Young people also face severe challenges within the housing market, including in being able to access and afford housing in the private and social rented sectors. The UK-wide programme of welfare reform and austerity measures initiated by the Coalition Government in 2010 and continued by the current Westminster Government has had a disproportionate impact on young people. Restrictions in entitlement to housing benefit and intensification of the sanctions regime have significantly compromised the welfare safety net available to young people. More generally, dramatic cuts to local authority budgets have had a significant negative impact on youth provision. It is in this context of fiscal austerity and welfare reform that local authorities across the UK are seeking to implement the policies and expanded duties surrounding youth homelessness outlined above. Though these policies – and the specific youth-targeted funding streams detailed above – might thus be considered to be moving in the right direction, the broader thrust of welfare reform has been in a direction clearly damaging to the prospects and wellbeing of many young people and indeed in a direction that key stakeholders in the sector believe is likely to undermine the stated objectives of youth homelessness specific policies.

In each of the four UK nations, there have been falls in levels of statutory or 'official' youth homelessness since 2008/09. These falls have been dramatic in England, Wales and Scotland, linked to the impact of the 'housing options' preventative approach. Other

measures of youth homelessness show different trends, however. Levels of rough sleeping among 18-25 year olds in London have increased by 40% since 2011/12, broadly in line with overall rough sleeping trends. More positively, the number of under 18 year olds seen sleeping rough in London remains consistently very low. Perhaps of most significance are a series of estimates of the overall scale of youth homelessness (i.e. statutory and non-statutory homelessness combined) across the UK: the most recent estimated that in 2013/14, 83,000 young people were in touch with homelessness services. Previous estimates – using different techniques and data sources and thus not directly comparable – suggest levels of at least 75,000 in 2006/07 and at least 78-80,000 in 2008/09. Taken together, these estimates suggest that declines in statutory youth homelessness have been at least offset by increases in other forms of youth homelessness. In the context of the substantial cuts to services and programme of welfare reform implemented since 2010 it is likely to reflect, at least in part, enhanced emphasis on proactive prevention during this period that levels of youth homelessness have not risen substantially. These pressures, and the capacity of young people to access adequate accommodation and avoid homelessness, look set to worsen in coming years.

This report has also highlighted changes in the profile and support needs of young homeless people. There is a strong consensus across the UK that a higher proportion of young people accessing homelessness services have complex needs than in the past, including – but not limited to – the very high prevalence of mental health issues. On the most positive interpretation, these trends reflect greater awareness and better identification of young homeless people's support needs, improvements in homelessness prevention among 'lower need' young people and/or better targeting of services to those in greatest need. More concerning, a possible contributing factor is the significant cuts to local authorities budgets that have resulted in reduced youth service provision and support budgets. Whatever the case, this shift in the profile and support needs of young homeless people raises a set of challenges for youth homelessness providers who are seeking to improve responses to young people with complex needs, including the development of psychologically informed approaches, at a time of substantial financial pressure.

That Class A substance misuse is less of a concern for youth homelessness providers than in the past is clearly to be welcomed, but use of New Psychoactive Substances is reportedly now a very significant problem for some youth homelessness providers. Ease of access to these 'legal highs', their low cost, and negative (as well as unpredictable) psychological and behavioural impacts are said to play a role in both causing and delaying the resolution of homelessness. Further to this, at the institutional level they are seen to create substantial difficulties in the management of supported accommodation projects. It appears that these issues vary geographically, however, with problematic legal high use worse in the North of England than in London, where 'harder' drugs are seen to dominate. Such geographic patterns in their use create a challenge for national level stakeholders and policy-makers seeking to tackle these issues.

This report has used the Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway as a framework within which to consider key gaps in provision in the sector and identify the most effective models to prevent and resolve youth homelessness. A wide range of (in some cases innovative) initiatives have been identified within the sector. These span: (1) preventative interventions (universal and targeted); (2) accommodation options for young people requiring varying levels of support; and (3) approaches seeking to enable young homeless people to access



employment and build their social networks. In the current context, there are particular challenges in ensuring adequate provision at each of these stages of the pathway.

Funding for 'upstream' *preventative interventions* is particularly strained in the current fiscal environment. There is also (rightly) anxiety about directing substantial resources to 'universal' forms of prevention, in particular where evidence regarding the effectiveness of such approaches is unavailable and, in any case, hard to generate. Given very clear evidence regarding the groups of young people most likely to experience homelessness, ensuring that those working with children, young people and their families are aware of these 'red flags' and able to respond to them before homelessness occurs seems a more strategically defensible investment of resources. Another challenge facing the preventative end of provision is that the mainstreaming of 'housing options' approaches in England, Wales and Scotland risks giving the impression that adequate preventative provision is available across all local authorities. This report highlights that much more could be done in this area, however, particularly in relation to improving the availability, uptake and effectiveness of mediation services; whole-family interventions and support; and access to respite or time-out emergency accommodation options while such family support and mediation is put in place.

The report has identified a wide-range of *models of accommodation* catering for young homeless people with low, medium and high support needs. A major challenge in the sector is how to provide good quality accommodation that is genuinely affordable to young people and does not create a work disincentive by pitching rent at a level that is unaffordable to those entering employment. Clearly, the ending of automatic entitlement to housing benefit is a major concern in this regard, though it is hoped that exemptions will minimise the impact on levels of youth homelessness. Young people's disproportionate exposure to benefit sanctions, the very low level of out-of-work and housing benefits to which they are in any case entitled, and the low wages (including the apprenticeship wage) and insecurity (e.g. zero-hours and short term contracts) that face even those who are in employment are also relevant. In this extremely challenging context, accommodation projects underpinned by financial models that permit a low rent to be charged are particularly valued. A number of means of achieving this have been identified in this report, including approaches that minimise support costs, minimise capital and building costs and/or bring together a range of funding streams, investors and 'in kind' contributions from employers and local partners.

There is clear scope for the development of new and scaling up of existing approaches aiming to improve the *employability* of young people experiencing homelessness and to strengthen their *social networks*. Interventions in this area represent a particular challenge for the sector, not least because they fall outside or beyond the 'core' prevention and accommodation-focused stages of the pathway. Existing evidence demonstrates the poor post-homelessness outcomes that many young people experience, highlighting the challenge of how youth homelessness organisations can not only meet the housing needs of young people, but help foster their longer term financial and psychological wellbeing. This is clearly a huge challenge in the context of highly restricted budgets, low-wage and insecure labour market opportunities for young people and a highly conditional social security system that relies heavily on sanctions, rather than a more supportive asset-based approach of the kind endorsed by participants in this study. It is also particularly challenging at a time when young homeless people are increasingly likely to have complex and multiple needs that may well present barriers to employment. A range of practical ways to improve the 'offer' to young

homeless people in this area have been provided here, key among them, the development of closer partnerships with local employers and the provision of pre- and in-work support.

Cutting across these stages of the pathway is an additional challenge: the lack of robust evidence attesting to the effectiveness of various approaches. Only a minority of the interventions endorsed by key informants in this report are supported by evidence regarding their capacity to secure positive outcomes. The success and cost effectiveness of the 'Housing First' model, for instance, has been clearly demonstrated in evaluations in England, Scotland and a number of other European countries, as well as in Canada and the US, where the model originated. However, this evidence speaks to the effectiveness of the approach with older chronic homeless individuals, with little evidence yet available regarding its application to young homeless people with complex needs. Some stakeholders in the sector suggest that the logic of the model is not directly applicable to those at an earlier stage in their life. There is research evidence on the positive outcomes and cost effectiveness of the Supported Lodgings model as a response to youth homelessness. This evidence gives tentative grounds for having confidence in the closely related but shorter-term, emergency accommodation model Nightstop. A small number of the interventions highlighted in this report have been subject to specific evaluation (for instance the Peer Landlord's scheme and the Shelter 'Safe and Sound' project). Several are supported by programme-specific data on positive outcomes (Psychologically Informed Environments and several mediation projects) and in some cases supportive qualitative testimony from users of the service in question (e.g. Nightstop). Specific research has also considered how to improve access the Private Rented Sector and identified some of the components that ensure the success of sharing models of accommodation. There is a lack of robust evidence on the relative short and (particularly) longer term impacts of different programmes.

Areas in which such evidence would be particularly valuable are the relative benefits and disbenefits of different supported accommodation models. Given concerns regarding the potentially negative consequences of some hostel-type congregate accommodation (particularly negative peer pressure; 'institutionalisation'; the loss of independent living skills; and work disincentive effects), research exploring the kinds of supported accommodation that minimise or avoid these effects, and the pros and cons of congregate versus 'community hosting' accommodation options would be particularly useful. Evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches to family mediation, lighter-touch conciliation work and whole-family/parenting support in preventing youth homelessness would also be extremely useful in further promoting and developing this cornerstone of youth homelessness services. In light of existing evidence on the poor outcomes many formerly homeless young people experience, there is also strong case for more effective monitoring of the impacts of various initiatives on formerly homeless young peoples' long-term wellbeing.

To conclude, despite a strong focus on homelessness prevention across much of the UK, and a number of other positive policy developments, the overall number of young people experiencing homelessness has not fallen and major challenges remain ahead in light of further planned welfare reforms. There has been good progress in the development of youth homelessness services across the pathway of responses now understood to be required in this area, even in the recent challenging context. Better evidence regarding the models that offer the most effective means of preventing homelessness – and of ensuring the long term wellbeing of those who do experience it – would provide firmer ground for the future development of interventions in the youth homelessness sector.

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