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# ON OUR SIDE

Improving services for young people experiencing homelessness



## CASE REPORT

MARCH 2024

*Laura Lane, Ellie Benton, Ruby Russell*

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NEW  
HORIZON  
YOUTH  
CENTRE



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Young Londoners are a resilient group, but the compounding impacts from crises of cost-of-living, housing and austerity is testing that resilience. At New Horizon Youth Centre we had our busiest ever day in January 2024 and we are witnessing the highest numbers of youth homelessness across the UK.

As the challenges facing young people grow, so too should the support. We know that for most young people who are struggling, families and friends step in, but for the 20,200 young people experiencing homelessness across the capital, this support network isn't there and they find themselves having to turn to public services.

Often the first people they turn to will be the housing teams at local councils, so it is vital the support offered is suitable, effective, and timely. However, many young people tell us this is not their experience, and they face multiple barriers in getting the support they deserve.

Therefore, we wanted to examine what happens when young people approach local authorities for housing support throughout London, what barriers they may face and what is working well. This report looks in depth at this issue and makes recommendations that can be implemented locally, across London, and nationally, feeding into wider national campaigns to end youth homelessness.

We recognise the extreme pressures that all local authorities are under at the moment, which makes working in partnership to implement the recommendations in this report even more important - so no young person gets left behind.

By working together, voluntary sector organisations and local authorities really can be on young people's sides when they need us the most.

**Phil Kerry, CEO New Horizon Youth Centre**

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# 01

## INTRODUCTION

Recent Centrepoint figures have suggested that over 135,000 young people aged 16–24 presented to councils as homeless, or at risk of homelessness, in 2022/23<sup>1</sup>, with over 20,000 of those young people presenting to councils for support in London alone. This represents a 5% increase nationally on 2021/22, and a 10% increase in London. The numbers of young people contacting their local authority when they are homeless or at risk of homelessness is only a fraction of the overall numbers, with estimates suggesting that 48% of all young people experiencing homelessness do not contact their local authority, or face barriers in doing so<sup>2</sup>. Research carried out by New Horizon with voluntary sector services across London also suggests that Black young people and LGBTQIA+ young people are especially at risk of being unable to access local authority services.

Of young people who presented to their local authority because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness in England in 2021/22, almost a third were not assessed for eligibility for a housing assessment and therefore were not eligible for any support. Of those young people who did receive a full assessment and were owed a duty only 38% had a positive outcome, meaning their homelessness

was successfully prevented or relieved, or they were housed under the main housing duty<sup>3</sup>.

Homelessness can impact a young person's health, wellbeing, education, and employment prospects, and can have long term effects on their future. Local authorities in London, facing severe pressures on their budgets and funding, have extremely limited options for housing people in need. Young people, unable or unwilling to engage in local authority services, often end up contacting voluntary sector organisations, such as New Horizon Youth Centre, for support. Voluntary organisations can bridge the gap in services for young people, providing an advocate role into and through local authority services, or providing alternative routes into housing. However, rising youth homelessness, a challenging housing market, and systemic underinvestment in young people's services is putting significant additional pressures on **both** voluntary sector and statutory services to respond to growing need.

In September 2023, LSE Housing and Communities were engaged by New Horizon Youth Centre, a youth homelessness charity based in Kings Cross, London, to carry out research about young people's

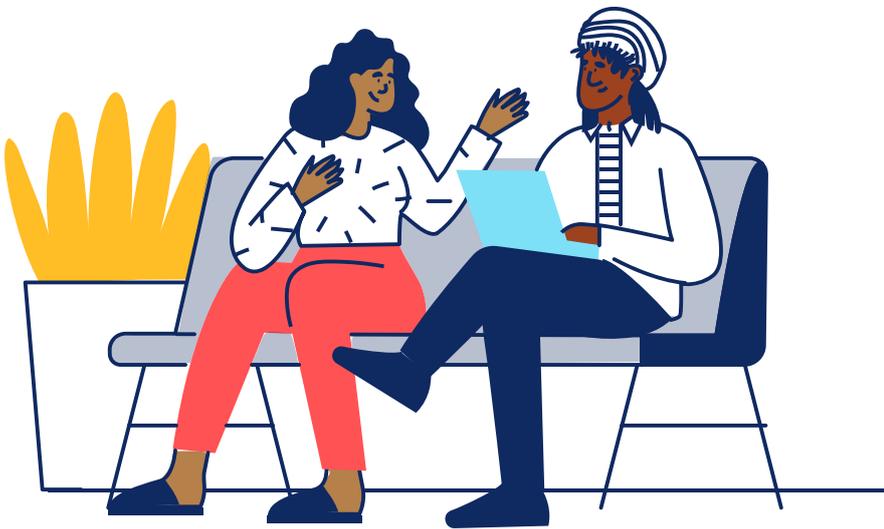
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<sup>1</sup>Booth, R. (2023). Hundreds seek council help every day in UK youth homelessness crisis. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/05/hundreds-look-council-help-every-day-in-uk-youth-homelessness-crisis>

<sup>2</sup>NHYC (2023). *Plan for the 136k Policy Briefing*. [https://nhyouthcentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Youth-Homelessness-Strategy\\_Policy-Briefing-v15.pdf](https://nhyouthcentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Youth-Homelessness-Strategy_Policy-Briefing-v15.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>Nicoletti, A. (2023). Unaccounted: The scale of youth homelessness in the UK. *Centrepoint*. <https://centrepoint.org.uk/research-reports/unaccounted-scale-youth-homelessness-uk>

<sup>4</sup>ITV (2023). "It's off the scale": Youth homelessness up 65% for one London shelter.



experience of engaging with local authority homelessness services, and to uncover how local authorities and voluntary services can more effectively work together to improve service standards and responses around youth homelessness.

New Horizon Youth Centre provides a day centre with holistic support and advice for young people, aged 16-24, experiencing homelessness. They also campaign on issues relating to youth homelessness. During the summer and early autumn of 2023, New Horizon Youth Centre encountered a 65% increase in demand for its services, with on average 49 new people coming into the centre per day<sup>4</sup>.

This research explores the issue of youth homelessness and local authority services from different perspectives, bringing in both young people's direct experience, and the policy and operational context that local authorities are operating in. It acknowledges that housing young people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, is a complex issue and aims to bring together an understanding what is happening on the ground in local authorities, and what young people need. Our aim is to provide workable, viable recommendations for how local authorities can better support young people when they approach their homelessness and housing services.

It is important to 'catch' young people at the very first point of them being at risk of homelessness, before they fall through the gaps. The recommendations in this report, informed

by the lived experiences of young people and acknowledging the operating and policy constraints of local authorities, could provide a way forward.



***At least don't treat us like we're some criminals or something, that we've done something wrong, at least listen to what we're saying and not be against us. Be on our side ... just listen to us.***



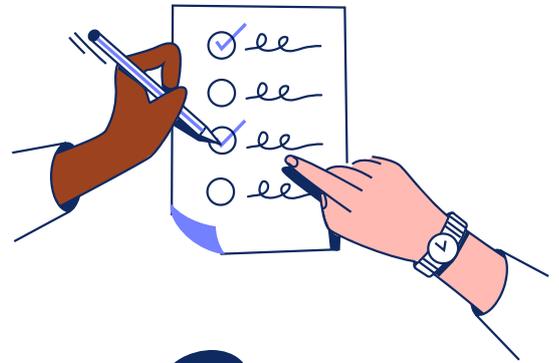
# 02

## THE RESEARCH

### RESEARCH AIMS

This research aims to:

- Explore, through qualitative research, young people's journeys into and through local authority services. This includes how and why they engage with local authority services; what their experiences of those services are; and the challenges encountered when contacting local authorities.
- Gain insight from young people into how local authority services could be made more inclusive and better suited to meeting young people's needs.
- Identify good practice examples of how local authorities and voluntary sector organisations can work together to provide better support for young people needing to contact local authorities when experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.
- Develop solutions-focused, practical recommendations for national and local government and the voluntary sector on how service standards can be improved for young people experiencing homelessness.
- Situate youth homelessness within the wider context of the housing crisis facing London and the competing financial, political, and operational challenges that local authorities are dealing with.



# METHODOLOGY

This report brings together qualitative research carried out by LSE Housing and Communities between September and December 2023. The research team conducted semi-structured interviews with young people experiencing homelessness, as well as housing representatives from local authorities and other stakeholders.

- In partnership with New Horizon Youth Centre, we engaged with 15 young people, aged 18-24, to explore their experiences of accessing, and their journey through, local authority housing services, as well as the support they had received from other organisations. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing the young people to share as much or as little information as they were comfortable with, and took place at New Horizon Youth Centre in Kings Cross.
- We carried out interviews with housing leads from four London local authorities: Islington; Lambeth; Enfield; and Kensington and Chelsea, representing both Labour-led and Conservative-led councils in the capital. We also introduced the research to the Pan-London Homelessness and Housing Needs group, made up of key housing and homelessness leads from across London authorities. This gave us an insight into how services for young people experiencing homelessness were set up and prioritised in different boroughs. We also discussed the policy and operational context of housing services in the capital, the challenges that local authorities were facing, and how this impacted on services for young people.
- We met with key stakeholders, including representatives from Centrepunt; St Basils; London Councils; DePaul UK, the London Youth Gateway and also with a central government official. These interviews highlighted how voluntary organisations worked with local authorities and young people to improve access to, and standards of, services.

- Using background research and interviews, we identified examples of good practice, where local authorities and the voluntary sector had worked together effectively to improve service standards for young people experiencing homelessness.
- Following the qualitative research, the research team developed recommendations that drew on the findings from the interviews with young people, stakeholders, and local authorities, as well as background research and good practice examples. We presented these draft recommendations at a work-in-progress roundtable at the LSE, with members of New Horizon and other key stakeholders in attendance. The aim of this roundtable was to sense-check the recommendations, discuss their viability and practicality, and to finetune them. As a result, it is hoped that the recommendations detailed in this report are practical, solutions-focused, and viable to take forward.



# 03

## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS: CAUSES AND CONTEXT

### CAUSES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Youth homelessness is complex, and often results from an interplay of factors, both structural and individual. According to a 2023 report into the scale of youth homelessness, the most common cause for presenting as homeless for a young person is family breakdown (46%)<sup>5</sup>. Other causes include domestic abuse (11%); eviction from a private, social or supported housing tenancy (7%); friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (6%); or the non-violent relationship breakdown with a partner (4%).

Whilst these factors may be the catalyst for a young person presenting as homelessness, other structural issues combine to reduce young people's housing options and increase the potential for homelessness. The lack of social housing supply, high rents in the private sector, and the cost-of-living crisis, combined with a lower minimum wage and lower level of benefits for under 25s, means there are few affordable homes available to young people. A 2020 study found that private renting was unaffordable anywhere in England for young people on a minimum wage, with rent on average costing 71% of an under 25s wage at the minimum rate<sup>6</sup>. Young people often struggle to be allocated a social property, with just 2% of total local authority, and 3.1% of housing association social tenancies allocated to young people in 2020-21.

### THE HOUSING CRISIS IN LONDON AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

The specific context of London creates additional challenges for tackling youth homelessness. The average monthly rent in London is now £2,501<sup>7</sup>, and there has been a 41% drop in the number of available private rented sector homes in the capital since 2017<sup>8</sup>. This has led to higher competition for rented properties as demand outstrips supply, particularly for more affordable properties. Landlords, already reticent to house younger tenants, have even less incentive to support young people experiencing homelessness. In some boroughs, local authorities have set aside significant sums to support young people experiencing homelessness into the private rented sector, for example to help with deposits or rents. Yet the funds remain unspent due to a lack of properties and lack of willingness from landlords to house young people. A report by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research<sup>9</sup> found that two-thirds of landlords were unwilling to let to under 35s claiming Housing Benefit/Universal Credit, due to concerns around managing the accommodation and fears about financial loss.

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<sup>5</sup> Nicoletti, A. (2023). Unaccounted: The scale of youth homelessness in the UK. *Centreport*. <https://centreport.org.uk/research-reports/unaccounted-scale-youth-homelessness-uk>

<sup>6</sup> Barker, N. (2020). Private renting unaffordable anywhere in England for young people on minimum wage. *Inside Housing*.

Alongside the challenges in the private rented sector, there is an extremely limited supply of social housing available in the capital. The right to buy, regeneration of existing estates, and lack of funding for new social homes has reduced the supply of social housing in London by 300,000 since its introduction in 1981<sup>10</sup>. The waiting list for a social home in England now stands at 1.2 million households, with 301,753 households on local authority housing waiting lists in London alone (one-quarter of the whole waiting list for England)<sup>11/12</sup>. The limited social housing that is available is allocated on a needs basis, meaning that young people with no additional needs are very unlikely to be allocated a social rented home.

The lack of social housing, high cost of owner-occupation, and the insecurity of private renting have also led to significant rises in temporary accommodation in London. Local authorities use temporary accommodation to house homeless families and individuals while suitable permanent housing can be found. The quality of temporary accommodation is often poor, and the lack of social homes and decreasing supply of PRS homes has meant that some families will be housed in hotels or B&Bs. There is a six-week limit for families and pregnant women to be housed in hotel or B&B accommodation, but the challenging housing market in London meant that there was a 781% increase in families in 2022/23 being housed in hotels and B&Bs in London beyond the six-week limit<sup>13</sup>. The amount councils spend on temporary accommodation is steadily growing and councils in London are now estimated to be spending £60

million a month on temporary accommodation and are facing serious funding shortfalls to cover those costs. Local authorities have called for the government to provide emergency funding for temporary accommodation, following a number of councils effectively declaring themselves bankrupt<sup>14</sup>.

This sets the context of extreme housing market pressures faced by local authorities, which young people experiencing homelessness must navigate.

A further complication and additional pressure on services is the Home Office's decision to close NASS hotels housing asylum seekers and aims to clear backlogged asylum applications. 80% of residents in these hotels are under 35, and if their asylum applications are accepted, they will need to find alternative accommodation<sup>15</sup>. Given the high levels of demand and shortage of affordable homes, it is likely that many of them will face homelessness. This will increase cost pressures on local authorities and on local housing supplies, as they become responsible for housing additional people, many of whom may have experienced trauma and need extra support, but without any additional funds being made available to councils to support the extra demand. During the 2023 winter period alone, 43% of day centre users at New Horizon were refugees/asylum seekers, compared to 17% the same time last year.

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<sup>6</sup> Barker, N. (2020). Private renting unaffordable anywhere in England for young people on minimum wage. *Inside Housing*.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, J. (2023) Average monthly rent hits £2500 in London and £1190 for rest of UK. *The Guardian*.

<sup>8</sup> Whitehead et al (2023). Supply of Private Rented Stock Sector Accommodation in London. *Savills and LSE Consulting*. <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/research/supply-of-private-rented-sector-accommodation-in-london/>

<sup>9</sup> Pattison, B. and Reeve, K. (2017). Access to homes for under-35's: The impact of Welfare Reform on Private Renting. Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/centre-regional-economic-social-research/publications/access-to-homes-for-under-35s-the-impact-of-welfare-reform-on-private-renting>

<sup>10</sup> Mayor of London (2022). Mayor's Right to Buy-back sees 1,500 homes return to council ownership. *London.gov.uk*. <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-hails-success-of-right-to-buy-back>

<sup>11</sup> London Datastore (2024). Households on Local Authority Waiting List, Borough. *London.gov.uk*. <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/households-local-authority-waiting-list-borough>

<sup>12</sup> Shelter (2023). 14,000 social homes lost last year, as over a million households sit on waiting lists. *Shelter*. [https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_release/14000\\_social\\_homes\\_lost\\_last\\_year\\_as\\_over\\_a\\_million\\_households\\_sit\\_on\\_waiting\\_lists#:~:text=Posted%2026%20Jan%202023,a%20net%20loss%20of%2014%2C100homes](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/14000_social_homes_lost_last_year_as_over_a_million_households_sit_on_waiting_lists#:~:text=Posted%2026%20Jan%202023,a%20net%20loss%20of%2014%2C100homes).

<sup>13</sup> Gecsoyler, S. (2023). Homeless families evicted as landlords quit London emergency housing sector. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/aug/29/homeless-families-evicted-landlords-quit-london-emergency-housing-sector>

<sup>14</sup> Riding, J. (2024). Temporary accommodation spending crisis could be the 'end of local government', council leaders warn. *Inside Housing*. <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/temporary-accommodation-spending-crisis-could-be-the-end-of-local-government-council-leaders-warn-84811>

# THE POLICY CONTEXT OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

This report focuses on young people, aged 16–24, who experience homelessness. Young people receive different support pathways based on age, and we set out here what those pathways are.

## → 16 and 17-year-olds

When a 16 or 17-year-old presents, or is referred, to the local authority as homeless or at risk of being homeless, the local authority must carry out an assessment to see what duties are owed to them. This applies to anyone under the age of 18, including those approaching their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, those who are pregnant, or those who have children in their care. If a child is considered “a child in need” under Section 20 of the Children Act, social services have a duty to accommodate and support that child. If a child is not considered a “child in need”, they will be owed homelessness duties and will have priority need meaning the council will have to provide temporary accommodation until they can be suitably housed.

### **Most 16 and 17 year olds experiencing homelessness will be classed as a “child in need” if:**

- “they are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by a local authority;
- their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of such services;
- they are disabled.”

### **Social services have a duty to provide accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds if:**

- “the child’s welfare is likely to be seriously prejudiced if they are not provided with accommodation;
- the child has no parents or carer;
- the parents or carer are unable or unwilling to provide accommodation.”

**When a 16 or 17-year-old approaches a local authority for support, the local authority has a duty to place them in temporary accommodation while a needs assessment is being carried out<sup>16</sup>.**

More comprehensive details on this are found in government guidance on prevention of homelessness and provision of accommodation issued in 2018:

*“Where a 16 or 17 year old seeks help from local authority children’s services, or is referred to children’s services by some other person or agency as appearing to be homeless or threatened with homelessness, children’s services must carry out an assessment of what duties, if any, are owed to them. This applies to all young people, including 17 year olds who are approaching their 18th birthday, and young people who are pregnant or have children in their care. Where the duty in section 20 of the 1989 Act is triggered the local authority are under a duty to accommodate the child.”<sup>17</sup>*

## → Young People from 18 years plus

**The Homelessness Reduction Act came into effect in April 2018 and placed two new duties on local authorities:**

- To take reasonable steps to prevent people from becoming homeless who are at risk of losing their accommodation in 56 days.
- To take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness for those already experiencing homelessness.

Eligibility applies at both prevention and relief stage, although LAs must provide free homelessness advice for all residents, including those not eligible. Eligibility is based on an individual’s immigration status: they must have “leave to remain”, have recourse to public funds and (with some exceptions) be habitually resident to be categorised as eligible.

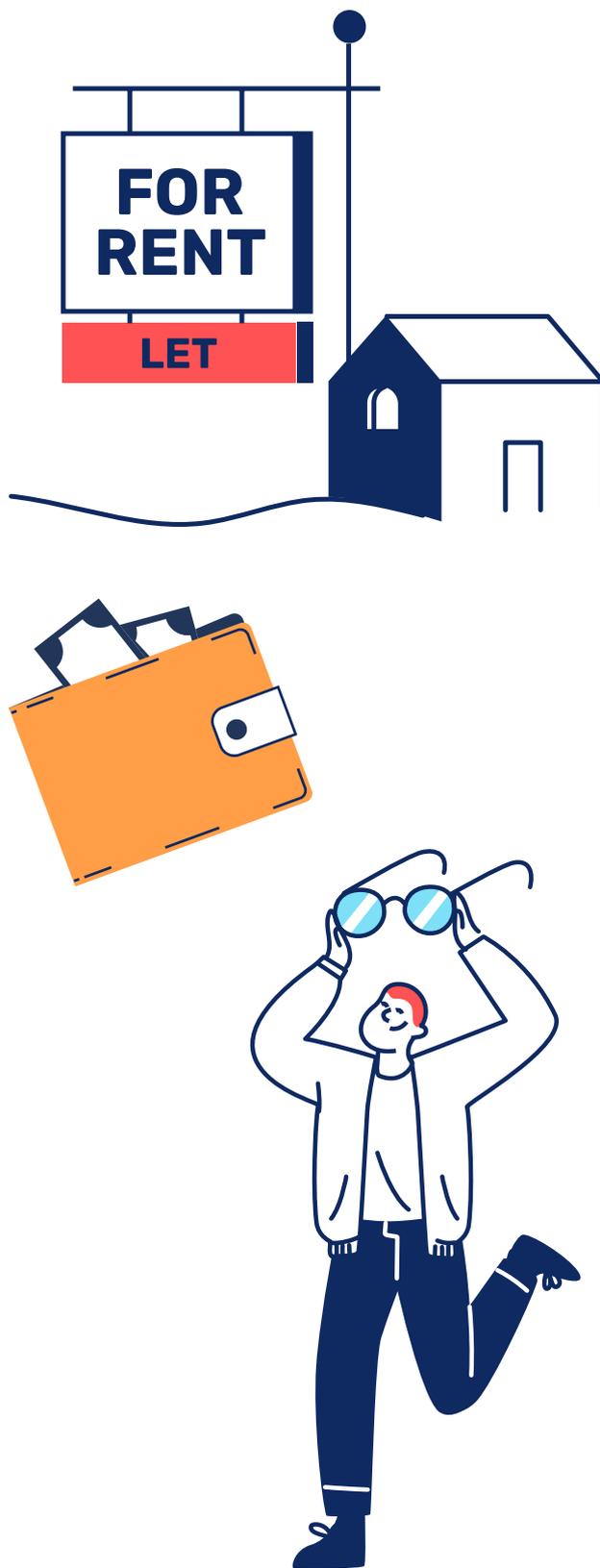
<sup>16</sup> Shelter (2024). Priority needs of homeless 16 and 17 year olds. *Shelter*. [https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/legal/homelessness\\_applications/priority\\_need\\_in\\_homelessness\\_applications/priority\\_need\\_of\\_homeless\\_16\\_and\\_17\\_year\\_olds#:~:text=Any%20duty%20owed%20to%20homeless,they%20have%20a%20priority%20need](https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/legal/homelessness_applications/priority_need_in_homelessness_applications/priority_need_of_homeless_16_and_17_year_olds#:~:text=Any%20duty%20owed%20to%20homeless,they%20have%20a%20priority%20need)

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government / Department for Education, 2018, Prevention of homelessness and provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b0ed0b240f0b634b1266bc9/Provision\\_of\\_accommodation\\_for\\_16\\_and\\_17\\_year\\_olds\\_who\\_may\\_be\\_homeless.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b0ed0b240f0b634b1266bc9/Provision_of_accommodation_for_16_and_17_year_olds_who_may_be_homeless.pdf)

Across England in 2022/23, 16–17-year-olds Across England in 2022/23, 16–17-year-olds made up 1% of statutory homelessness cases, and 18–24-year-olds made up 18%. However, research by Centrepoint found that almost a third of young people (16–24) who have approached a local authority in England did not have a homelessness assessment; this number has fallen from 79% of young people receiving an assessment in 2018/19 to 68% in 2021/2022, since the Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced<sup>18</sup>.

### → Age-based benefits

Universal credit (UC) rates vary depending on age, with a single claimant under 25 only eligible for £292.11 per month, compared to £368.74 for over-25s. In addition, single people under 35, with no children, are restricted to the 'shared accommodation rate' of Local Housing Allowance. This makes many properties in the private sector unaffordable for young people, and may mean that they have to live in a shared accommodation property which does not suit their needs. There are exemptions for care leavers under 25 and severely disabled people, or people who have experienced domestic abuse. Young people have reported feeling unsafe and vulnerable when placed in unsuitable shared accommodation, and of having to move areas to find any accommodation that is affordable due to the lower rate of housing allowance<sup>19</sup>.



<sup>18</sup> Nicoletti, A. (2023). Unaccounted: The scale of youth homelessness in the UK. *Centrepoint*. <https://centrepoint.org.uk/research-reports/unaccounted-scale-youth-homelessness-uk>

<sup>19</sup> Ortega-Alcazar, I. and Wilkinson, E. (2020). *Housing Benefit and Age Discrimination: Young women living in shared accommodation in the private rental sector. Summary Report. Young Women's Trust*. <https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Housing-benefit-age-discrimination-summary-report.pdf>

# 04

## **NEW HORIZON YOUTH CENTRE**

**In 2022/23 NHYC supported 1146 young people across all of its services. These include a day centre, remote support, community and street outreach, and prison outreach. We were provided with data from New Horizon about the demographics of young people they support<sup>20</sup>.**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

- The majority of young people supported by New Horizon are male (56%) compared to female (37%), non-binary (2%) and transgender (1%).
- New Horizon supports people from the age of 16-24, and will support young people in urgent situations beyond their 25th birthday. The majority (55%) are aged 18-21. 38% are aged 22-24, 4% are aged 16-17, and 2% are 25.
- 50% of the young people supported by New Horizon are "Black/African/Caribbean/Black British". 20% are "White", 9% are "Mixed/multiple ethnic group", 8% are categorised as "other ethnic group" and 6% are "Asian".
- 73% of the young people are heterosexual and 14% are LGBTQIA+.
- 31% of the young people have spent some time in the care system.

### **DISABILITY AND ADDITIONAL NEEDS**

- 11% of the young people report that they have a disability, these include autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, mobility problems, visual impairment, and chronic illness.
- 22% of the young people report having mental health and emotional wellbeing needs. 7% had special educational needs and 4% needed additional physical health needs.



<sup>20</sup> Data is recorded at time of presentation to New Horizon Youth Centre's services. Data may under- or overreport true figures.

## INCOME

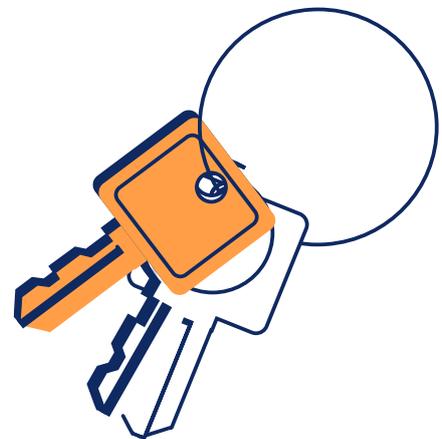
- 44% of the young people are claiming benefits.
- The majority (75%) are not in employment, education, and training. 17% are in employment, and 5% are in education or training.
- 6% of the young people have no recourse to public funds.

## HOUSING SITUATION

- The young people supported by New Horizon experienced a range of housing situations. At the time of presenting to their services, 31% were in some form of accommodation, such as living with parents (13%); emergency or short-term accommodation (11%); long term accommodation (5%); or living in their own accommodation (2%). 59% had no accommodation; 33% were sleeping rough and 26% were sofa surfing.
- One third (33%) of young people have been homeless for less than a month. 7% have been homeless for more than a year.

## CONTACT WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- 51% of young people had contacted a local authority. Interestingly, 13% of users didn't know if they had, perhaps due to a lack of clarity in the system. 17% of young people had received an assessment under the Homelessness Reduction Act, but similar to the LA contact, a large number (38%) did not know if they had received an assessment.



# MERCY'S STORY

Mercy became homeless five years ago, when she was 19. Her mother moved away, and her brother no longer wanted her living in the family home. Since then, she has moved between hostels, squats, rough sleeping and sofa surfing. The longest she has stayed anywhere is nine months, and she has often been asked to move at a day's notice. This lack of stability has made it hard for her to build a routine or find a job.

Mercy was often placed in accommodation that made her feel unsafe, as she was housed with older men with drug and alcohol dependence issues and was sexually assaulted while living in these settings. When she asked to leave and be provided with accommodation in a different area and ideally in a different borough, so she would feel safer, she was told the council could only house her within the borough. In one hostel, she was attacked by an older woman, but it was Mercy who was forced to move from the hostel. Mercy thinks there should be more single gender accommodation that is designed for young people.

Mercy tried to secure a property through the council bidding system but ran into challenges. She feels unsafe in many parts of the borough due to situations in the past. The local authority told her that she must view properties that become available in these areas otherwise it suggests she is not "actively helping herself". If she cancels a booking, it can be considered as a 'failure to cooperate', and the council's duty to support her could be ended. At one stage, she was placed on an 'automated bidding' system without her knowledge and viewings were automatically cancelled without informing her. She was then penalised for this as it appeared she was making the cancellations.

Before Mercy became homeless, she feels she lived a very shielded life and didn't have much knowledge of the adult world, which made her very vulnerable. She thinks she should have received more support on what help she is entitled to, how things like taxes work, support with her physical and mental health, and how to navigate adulthood. She thinks all young people in her situation should receive a 6-week guidance course, to help with both housing and social and emotional support. Mercy values the help she received from New Horizon as they offer holistic support across a range of issues.

After 5 years of constantly moving, Mercy has finally been given her own flat through the council bidding system, and support from a solicitor from Shelter. She likes her new flat and is currently furnishing it using Freecycle, a furniture recycling website.



# 05

## INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

### OVERVIEW

**For the research, we spoke to 15 young people being supported by New Horizon Youth Centre. Some had been housed in their own flat or shared accommodation, some were sofa surfing, and some were sleeping rough. The young people we spoke to had experienced homelessness for varying lengths of time. We conducted semi-structured, informal interviews with the young people to understand their experiences of local authority homelessness services, and their journeys into and through homelessness more generally. This part of the report summarises the findings from those interviews.**

### Our interviewees

We were able to use the overall demographic data to assess the representativeness of the sample of young people we spoke to. Our small sample of 15 people was broadly representative of all the young people accessing support from New Horizon, and included a range of experiences of homelessness.

- We spoke to seven young men, six young women, one person who is non-binary, and one person who preferred not to share their gender identity.
- Nine of the interviewees are “Black/African/Caribbean/Black British”, three people are Asian, one person is White, and two people are “Mixed/multiple ethnic group”, one “White/Asian”, and one “White/Black Caribbean”.

- Of the young people we spoke to, at time of interview, nine young people had been provided with some form of accommodation:
  - Two in their own flats
  - One in supported accommodation
  - One in university halls
  - Two in a long-term hostel
  - Two in short-term hostel
  - One person was moving between short-term hostels and staying with friends.
- Of the six young people that had not yet been provided with accommodation, one young person was staying with a relative, four were sleeping rough, and one young person was moving between sleeping rough and staying with friends.



# HEADLINE FINDINGS

## 01

### **What support had young people received?**

Of the 15 interviewees, 14 had been in touch with a local authority in some capacity, although the level of contact varied dramatically. This ranged from reaching out to the local authority once and receiving little to no support, to being supported into permanent housing. Only five young people said the support they received had been helpful, and only one had received a personalised housing plan. Two people were not sure if they had received a personalised plan, suggesting a lack of clarity in what support young people had received. Three interviewees had been in care in a local authority outside of London but had not received any local authority support since they moved to London.

The most positive example of local authority support given was a young person who had asked their college for help when they felt unable to go on living with their family. Their college got in touch with the local authority, and they were placed in temporary accommodation for four days, before being moved into permanent supported accommodation.

## 02

### **Young people not feeling listened to or understood by local authorities**

Interviewees often reported feeling that local authority staff did not care about their situation or did not take their situation seriously. Some were told that being kicked out of their family home wasn't "a big deal", or the severity of it was belittled, being told that they were "just kicked out". One young person said that they had been made to feel like a criminal. A number of young people said they were made to feel like they were lying about their situation. Interviewees reported local authority staff avoiding talking to them or making eye contact and acting as if they had never met them before, even though they had attended often.



***"I feel like they're not trying. Even the way they speak, like, after I told them... I'm not pregnant they're, like, 'Oh you just got kicked out from your mum's house'... [they act like] it's not a big deal what I'm going through. ...It just showed that they didn't care."***

***"At least don't treat us like we're some criminals or something, that we've done something wrong, at least listen to what we're saying and not be against us. Be on our side and not just get worried about doing something, just listen to us."***

***"They were horrible to be honest, they were horrid... I'd been going there all week and telling them about the same problem and they was acting as if they'd never seen me, and didn't know me."***



## 03

### *Evidence, evidence, evidence*

Our interviewees felt that local authorities often placed unrealistic demands on young people to provide evidence about their situation. In some cases, the local authority refused to offer young people support until evidence and official documents were provided. Young people often found it difficult to secure the evidence being asked for. For example, one participant was asked to provide evidence of their family discriminating against their queer, non-binary identity. The council did not take their experience seriously or provide support until they were put into so-called 'conversion therapy' by their family. Similarly, one participant's experience of domestic abuse was not believed or taken seriously as they had not reported it to the police.



*It's just like evidence, evidence, evidence, acting like we're lying or something."*

*"[The local authority] was asking me for a letter of evidence that I was experiencing domestic abuse, like, he was asking me if I reported it anywhere. I was like what do you mean evidence, why are they asking for evidence... They gave me a week [to find evidence]."*

*"The application process took ages because I didn't have my passport and they couldn't do anything until I had my documents, but that was hard because of my situation."*



A number of young people said that it was difficult to provide evidence that they had been kicked out of their family home, and to provide official documents needed to complete applications, due to the nature of their strained family relationships. The local authority struggled to understand complicated family situations, for example, calling parents/guardians to confirm a young person's story, which young people felt could put them in more danger and worsen family relationships. In one case, a young person's guardian falsely claimed that they had not kicked them out, which meant the participant struggled to get local authority support from then onwards.



*"You just have to repeat the same information again and again, and they give you the same answer, and nothing changes."*



Young people spoke about the difficulty of having to repeat their story multiple times to different services. Repeatedly recounting traumatic experiences was frustrating and upsetting for young people, particularly when they still did not receive the support they needed.



# 04

## Lack of clarity in local authority systems

### Not knowing what to do or where to go

Young people expressed confusion over what support was available to them and how to ask for help. One young person said they were so confused that they ended up not asking for help at all. This confusion went beyond asking local authorities for help; one interviewee said that young people often do not know about support available from voluntary sector organisations.



*"They just don't help me like how I was expecting, 'cause I just didn't know what to do... When I got kicked out... I had no idea where to go, who to contact, and I'm still learning."*

*"They were saying 'Oh you'd have to do XYZ' and I didn't know what I was doing so I just put it off."*

*"Most people don't know there are organisations, they just think there's the council, but they don't realise there are organisations that are connected to the council that know more than the council itself. People need to be aware of that, there are people you can ask for help, and they can help you."*



### Lack of communication

Young people reported that communication from local authorities was often poor. They were not given clear advice, or were passed from person to person, meaning they often gave up asking for help. One young person explained that all communication with their local authority went via the charity



*(How could local authority services improve?) "I would say [the local authority] being a bit more direct. Just in general being direct as in... they can do this, they can do that. If they can't do this, they can't do that, at least let it be known, so then everyone knows what to do and the next steps."*

*"When I got through to someone, they'll be like 'Oh this person is for another thing'... so I have to call this number or they have to switch you to another number. It was just a bit too much... not being direct. I just feel like they wasn't really gonna be able to help me as much, so then I just thought, I'll just leave it... I just thought let me just try find somewhere else."*

*"They didn't refer me to any places, they didn't have an appointment to talk to me again. I went three times, the first time was filling out the forms, the second time was more waiting and the time after that they told me to come, and when I came again it was a waste of my time."*



that was supporting them, when they would have preferred direct communication. Another young person said they would have appreciated clarity and transparency about what support the local authority could and could not realistically offer them. The lack of clarity meant that they did not know what their next steps should be.

### **Inconsistent support from local authorities**

Across the young people we spoke to, there were significant variations in the support they had received from local authorities. One person had been housed immediately after approaching the council as homeless, yet for others it had taken years to be placed in a permanent home. Some young people received little to no support, for example, only being provided a charity's phone number without any follow-on assistance.

One person who had been provided with a flat was also supported with furniture and decorating, whilst other interviewees were told they had to arrange this themselves.

Two young people, who had travelled to London after leaving care, were told they were not eligible for support because they had no local connection to the borough that they approached as homeless. On the other hand, one young person who had been a victim of domestic abuse had been given a social property in an inner-London borough where they did not have a local connection. It was not clear to young people why some people were able to secure a flat, while others were not.



***"I applied in April this year and got into a flat in June, which is good, and people say, 'Oh you're lucky', but isn't that what's meant to happen for other people? So, it makes no sense why my case was the lucky one. Why are other people treated differently? Everyone should have the same opportunity."***



Some young people commented that young men and women were treated differently within the system. Young men and boys were expected to be "tough" and "just get on with things" and were not seen to be as vulnerable. As a result, it was felt they were not offered as much support as young women and girls.

One young person felt that race played a role in how people were treated within the system and reported that different groups were expected to meet different requirements. They claimed to have seen White people being provided with accommodation without evidence of their situation, and Black people being required to provide evidence before their homeless application would be accepted.



***"When you are Black, you see White people and they say they have been kicked out their house and they get a house with no evidence. Then a Black person says the same with evidence, and they say that's not enough evidence, we need proof. You see it time and time again."***



## 05

### Local authorities offering inappropriate and inadequate support

Where support was offered by the local authority, young people explained that it was often inappropriate and inadequate to their needs. One young person who had been a victim of domestic abuse was placed in a mixed gender hostel against their wishes and needs. Other young people spoke about being placed with people with drug and alcohol dependency issues, which made them feel unsafe. Young people were concerned that if they refused to take accommodation, they would be considered 'intentionally homeless' and not entitled to further support.

However, this was not the case for everyone, and other participants had been placed in gender- and age-appropriate accommodation, which they highlighted as helpful.



***"I was put into a shared house full of bad people. The experience was very stressful, people were taking drugs and trying to abuse me. It was bad for my mental health."***

***"I keep telling them you can't just put me in a house full of drug addicts, crack heads and people who have come out of prison, then say '[she has] done this to herself, and [she has] got herself raped'. Then they get to stay for their protection, and I have to leave. I was 19/20 at the time, what are you doing putting me with these grown arse people smoking crack and then you get shocked when something bad has happened."***

***"They put me in a shared accommodation with men and all mixes of ages which wasn't suitable for [me], I didn't feel safe after what had happened. If I didn't take it, they would discharge their duties, and say I was intentionally homeless."***



One participant presented as homeless to his local authority at age 17 but did not have his entitlements under Section 20 of the Children Act explained to him. Under this legislation, children presenting as homeless should have the option to be taken into care and be considered a 'looked-after child'. The child should be given a Personal Adviser who can support with accommodation, education, training, and career guidance, which is overseen by a social worker and can continue until age 25. The participant explained that he was forced into living in a hostel with no support, without being told about his entitlements when he presented as homeless as a child.



***"They're supposed to present you with your two options... You'll be fostered, then when you become of age you get your own place... and then the other one is the independent living, being in a hostel and you move out on your own. But you're supposed to have a Personal Adviser that works with you and you're supposed to have the option of the two... Obviously I didn't go through that, they never gave me the option... They just placed me in a hostel and I didn't have a social worker after that."***



Several years later, the same participant was told that he would be supported into private renting and was offered a £2000 deposit, but he struggled to find anywhere that would accept him due to being on Universal Credit and did not receive any support with the search for accommodation. He felt that the local authority was “dangling two thousand pound in front of my eyes”



***“[The local authority] would assist with a deposit of up to £2000 straight to the landlord. That’s not really much help to be honest because I couldn’t find anywhere that would accept me... They were just dangling two thousand pound in front of my eyes telling me to find somewhere.”***



***“I don’t even really feel like I’m 18. I just turned 18... but it’s like ‘Oh you’re 18, you’re old enough’ and I’m like, I know I’m old but at the same time, it’s like I didn’t get used to all of this. I don’t know what to do. So, it’s just like they’re expecting me to know what I’m doing or what to do next because of my age. It’s just so frustrating like calling and it’s like ‘Oh we can’t do anything, you’re over 18, if you were 17, we could help you’.”***

***“Maybe from like 18 to a certain age, 24 or 25, I feel like you’re still young, we don’t know what we’re doing or where we’re meant to go... so we’re figuring it out. So, I feel like they should... focus on young people more.”***

## 06

### **Support systems disappearing at 18**

Several young people emphasised the challenge of turning 18, and the systems and structures to protect children disappearing overnight, whilst simultaneously being expected to know how to navigate services as an ‘adult’. One participant described the frustration of presenting to their local authority and being told “We can’t do anything, you’re over 18. If you were 17, we could help you”. Another young person felt that they needed more guidance on how to navigate the adult world, including how taxes and benefits work.

***“I kept thinking everyone that smiles is nice, but it’s not like that. They need to say you are entitled to this. You can have these benefits. You can contact a solicitor. Do you have any physical or mental problems? Can you work? This is what taxes are. I don’t know, I am still learning. At hospital they would ask me if I had an adult social worker, but they didn’t explain what that is.”***



Another young person had been placed in hostel accommodation at 17 years old, but was never chased for their rent and built up arrears over several years. These arrears from the hostel led to them being asked to leave and have meant that they are ineligible for a social housing property. They felt that they should have received more support and guidance about managing their rent, particularly as they were a child when they first began staying at the hostel.

Another interviewee had fallen through the gaps of mental health support as they were due to turn 18 a few months after receiving their first diagnosis. As a result, they were not supported by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), whilst also not being eligible for adult services.



***“Obviously I accept the responsibility that I had to pay but they definitely did not really assist in guiding me so much, because I should have never been able to keep doing it... I was 17 when I started living there so I was underage.”***



## 07

### ***‘Local connection’ as a barrier to accessing support***

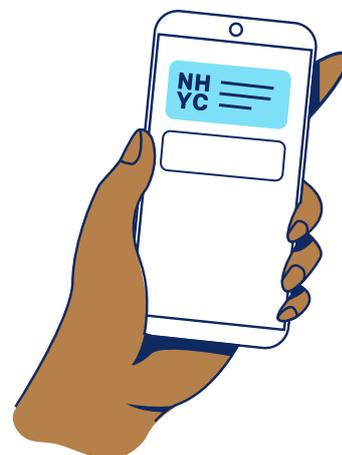
Four young people had been previously supported by local authorities in an area outside of London; three in the care system; and one in Home Office accommodation. All four of these interviewees felt that their previous accommodation was inappropriate and had negatively impacted their mental health. Two young people we spoke to had moved to London to be in a more culturally diverse place where they could make connections with others from their ethnic and religious communities but were currently sleeping rough. Another young person was asked to leave Home Office accommodation when they received Right to Remain status but was not offered support to find alternative accommodation.

After leaving their accommodation and traveling to London, all four were told they were not eligible for support from a London borough because they did not have a local connection. Young people explained that when approaching a borough where they did not have a local connection, staff were dismissive, and they were told to seek support from their original local authority instead.



***“I was in care in [area] and was put into a shared house full of bad people. The experience was very stressful, people were taking drugs and trying to abuse me. It was bad for my mental health. I came to London because I have better contacts here. I have been living on the street for 20 days.”***

***“I didn’t feel safe there... I feel like I don’t like it because my community is here in London and the Ethiopian Orthodox church is here... I feel isolated there, I need my community.”***



## 08

### **Importance of having an advocate in receiving support from local authorities**

Several young people spoke about the importance of having an advocate when interacting with the local authority. A number of young people expressed that they were only listened to when they had a charity advocating on their behalf and felt this support was the reason why they eventually received help. One young person was asked to provide evidence of domestic abuse, such as police reports, which they did not have, and was only offered a social property after the charity supporting them made a complaint, which led to the local authority removing the 'evidence' requirement.



***"There are so many [young people] here... They tried to contact the council and they told me don't go to the council, they are gonna take long and they won't give any support. But if you go to an organisation that connects to the council, you can get through easily."***

***"[The local authority] was asking me for a letter of evidence that I was experiencing domestic abuse, like he was asking me if I reported it anywhere. I was like what do you mean evidence, why are they asking for evidence? But then eventually the charity made a complaint. If I didn't have a charity on my side, I might not have had the help."***



## 09

### **Young people need more than just housing support**

#### **Jobs and education**

Help with jobs and education is crucial in supporting young people to rebuild their lives, and several young people spoke about wanting to get back into education and work. One young person highlighted how helpful the New Horizon JET programme had been, which recognised their individual support needs.



***"New Horizon helped me, it's called JET, so jobs, education, training. I was doing a portfolio and... she was quite helpful, I've got ADHD. She was quite strict with me, like you have to do this, being stern with me, so it helped me get it done, get things done with that authority. I found that helpful, she was strict in a way and when I'm wandering off somewhere she's like go back to what you're doing."***

***"At the moment I want to focus on my education. I am 18, I want to work part time and be a proper person. I need pocket money, to work part time. Then I want somewhere to sleep over so I can [work]."***



## Emotional and mental health support

Support with emotional and mental wellbeing, in addition to shelter, is crucial to help young people rebuild their lives following traumatic experiences. In interviews with young people, it was clear that an isolated focus on practical housing support will not adequately address young people's wellbeing and mental health support needs. Several participants highlighted the holistic support offered by New Horizon as particularly beneficial in addressing this. The young people explained that it often felt like no one cared about them, and that they wanted someone to be "on my side", which New Horizon offered. It was clear that services and relationships where young people feel genuinely cared about and looked out for are crucial in supporting young people to navigate the next stage of their lives.



***"They need someone, not just housing, for their mental health, they need someone to rely on. That's why we have counselling here at New Horizon."***

***"I feel like they do a lot. They help us with housing, even the food they feed us is good, so it helps us eat and also be healthy. They also help us keep productive by doing a lot of activities... Also, when you come to the centre, it keeps us out of the streets and out of trouble because when we're here we're safe, and there's a lot of people around us as well so we're all in a safe environment, and it's a happy place as well because all the staff are welcoming, and they all care about us."***



# DEVAN'S STORY

Devan has been homeless for over five years, since being kicked out by his grandma at age 17. He stayed at his aunty's house temporarily, but there was not enough space for him to stay permanently. Every day for a week, Devan visited his local authority in-person on his lunch breaks from his apprenticeship to explain that he needed assistance with finding somewhere to stay. Staff told him he would need a letter from his grandma to confirm he had been kicked out, as well as a letter from his auntie to say he could no longer stay with her. Devan got the letter from his grandma and auntie, whose letter said she was kicking him out on Friday. On the Friday, he took the day off work and went to the council with all his belongings. Despite going there every day on his lunch break for a week, the staff acted as if they had never met him before and didn't know him. Devan stayed at the council housing office until past closing time because they wouldn't help him.

***"They were horrible to be honest, they were horrid... I'd been going there all week and telling them about the same problem and they was acting as if they'd never seen me and didn't know me".***

***"They were beyond reluctant to actually assist to be honest".***

Devan found himself a Shelter hostel to stay in for the night and went back the next day with his aunty. They told him they would need to do an assessment to see if there were any other family members he could stay with, which was frustrating as he had already asked if there was anyone else in the family that he could stay with. A social worker went to his grandma's address to ask if he could stay there, and his grandma falsely claimed that he hadn't been kicked out. The local authority made an arrangement with his aunty for Devan to stay with her until the council found accommodation for him. Two months later, the local authority placed him in a hostel for young people aged 16-25. Devan lived in the hostel for five years but sometimes struggled to pay his rent due to mental health issues. He felt he was not given any support or guidance about paying his rent on time, despite being a child when he first began staying there. Shortly after moving into the

hostel, his social worker quit, and he was never assigned a new one. Devan lived in the hostel until a few months ago, when he was kicked out due to his rent arrears.

Despite first approaching the council at age 17, Devan never had his rights under section 20 of the Children Act explained to him. Under this Act Devan should have been given the option to be classified as a 'looked after child' which entitles you to a personal adviser, and care leaver status post 18. Instead of being given this option Devan feels he was forced into a hostel without being offered any alternative. He is now receiving legal help through a charity to see whether he should be entitled to care leaver status.

Since being kicked out of the hostel, Devan has been sofa surfing and sleeping in a relative's car. Devan went to the GP for support with his mental health and was referred to New Horizon Youth Centre by a social prescriber. The social prescriber was very helpful, and he feels he can contact her at any time of day or night if he needs help. She is one of the only people he has received support from where it felt like she genuinely cared about him. Recently, a charity supported Devan to make a homeless application to his local authority, however he continues to face challenges. For example, a recent housing assessment appointment he had waited over a month for was unexpectedly cancelled due to a mix up saying that he had already had the appointment. His local authority offered him a £2000 deposit to help him into the private rented sector, but he struggled to find anywhere that would accept him due to being on Universal Credit, and he has not received any assistance from the local authority to help him find somewhere.

***"They were just dangling two thousand pound in front of my eyes telling me to find somewhere, but there's no assistance in finding anywhere that would accept me."***

Devan that felt that more should be done to ensure staff, both local authority and voluntary sector, have the right personal skills to support and understand young people's experiences. He thought this would make the most difference to young people.

# 06

## INTERVIEWS WITH **LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND STAKEHOLDERS**

### OVERVIEW

As described above, we carried out interviews with housing leads from four London local authorities: Islington; Lambeth; Enfield; and Kensington and Chelsea, representing both Labour-led and Conservative-led councils in the capital.

We also met with other key stakeholders, including representatives from Centrepoin; St Basils; the London Youth Gateway, DePaul UK and a central government official. These interviews highlighted how voluntary organisations worked with local authorities and young people to improve access to, and standards of, services.

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The box on the next page shows the key discussion points we used as a basis for our semi structured interviews:

### HEADLINE FINDINGS

Our interviews with stakeholders were broad and covered a range of issues relating to how services for young people currently work, and what could be done better. Below we summarize the headline findings under four themes:

- The context within which local authorities are operating
- Multi-agency working
- Barriers facing young people when accessing local authority support
- Targeted work and services specifically designed around needs of young people

#### Context

Given the wider challenges and limitations facing local authorities across the country, it was important in all of our discussions with local authority representatives to acknowledge and understand this context.

There are ever increasing demands on services, particularly children's and adult social services as well as homelessness. This increasing demand sits

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- About youth homelessness generally – where does it sit within the Council? e.g. links between housing, social services, schools.
- Where does youth homelessness fit within current services / policies / strategies?
  - Numbers of young people affected?
  - Services used?
  - Feedback / engagement with young people
  - Barriers to accessing young people
- How do young people get into the services?
  - Via the housing department or referred by other orgs?
  - What is their pathway then?
- What are the key issues for your area (and London more widely) in addressing youth homelessness?
- Collaboration with voluntary sector:
  - Current partnership arrangements?
  - Main organisations involved?
  - Other collaborations planned?
- Is there more that your council could be doing / is planning in this area?
- What would make the most difference to helping young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness?
- What more could central government / other statutory organisations / the voluntary sector do to help address youth homelessness?
- Do you know of any good practice examples (from your area or elsewhere) where local authorities and voluntary sector orgs are working together on this?

alongside budgetary challenges, with the Local Government Association estimating that local authorities face a funding gap of £4 billion over the next two years<sup>21</sup>. The difficulty of increased demand and stretched budgets, particularly in terms of funding homelessness services, was highlighted in a BBC article in November 2023:

*“London Councils has called on the government to provide at least a 9% funding boost in the Autumn Statement to help meet a £600m shortfall. The body, which represents the city’s 32 borough councils, forecasts the collective annual overspend has increased by 50% due to a spike in spending between June and September. This is due to “London’s worsening homelessness crisis”.”<sup>22</sup>*

It is important to acknowledge the differences between individual boroughs and areas. The specific housing context in terms of supply, demand, access, and affordability will vary by area. Solutions that

are appropriate and cost effective in one borough may not be transferable to others. There will also be different organisational structures, political priorities, and policies in place. Therefore, while it is really important to learn lessons from best practice and case studies, it is unlikely that there will be one-size-fits-all solutions available. Acknowledging and understanding the local context will be crucial to the effective delivery of services to young people experiencing homelessness.

### Multi-agency working

Many of the stakeholders we spoke to in local and central government, as well as the third sector, identified multi-agency working and multi-agency hubs as incredibly valuable sources of support for young people. The co-location of different statutory and non-statutory services offers more holistic approaches to young people and enables person-centered solutions to be found.

<sup>21</sup> Cuffe, G. (2023). ‘Unthinkable’: councils say £64bn settlement not enough to meet ‘severe’ pressures’. *Inside Housing*. <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/unthinkable-councils-say-64bn-settlement-not-enough-to-meet-severe-pressures-84451>

<sup>22</sup> Kelly, J. (2023). Councils face £600m shortfall amid London ‘homelessness crisis’. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-67475551>

Local authority representatives saw a valuable role here for the voluntary sector in enabling more varied and also targeted support, extending beyond the core statutory offer. This was seen to be particularly helpful given the challenges facing local authorities in terms of resourcing, and the potential of voluntary sector partners to bring in specialist support as well as their ability to fundraise.

Multi-agency working could enable services to 'wrap around the young people'. This is highlighted in the Birmingham Youth Hub, which is part of the St Basils Positive Pathway Framework in the West Midlands:



***"All of the Commission providers in Birmingham take their referrals from the youth hub so young people don't have to go anywhere; everything wraps around them from that point and there is only one place they need to go... I'm not saying it's easy; it's not, because there are multiple challenges for different parts of the system. But if we can reduce all of that movement, and if we can bring our resources together, cross-sector, cross-systems, and make it easy for the person that needs the assistance rather than all the bits that we want to do, then... we're much more likely to have positive outcomes and they're much more likely to experience positive outcomes". (Voluntary sector representative)***



In addition to multi-agency working, it is also vital that councils themselves work cohesively with close collaboration and joint working across housing / homelessness and children's services. Early intervention in terms of family reconnection and mediation, as well as other early intervention services was viewed as incredibly valuable. We also spoke to council representatives about how young people accessed support. There were different services available in-person (although in some areas, face to face or drop-in support services reduced following COVID distancing requirements and have not returned to pre-pandemic levels), and online or by telephone. The exact service delivery arrangements were based on local need, available resources, and partnership arrangements. There was an acknowledgement that there will always be a need for in-person support and access to services, but also that there needs to be clear online guidance and pathways to support. Having wide ranging and holistic support services available, in physical or online format, to enable local authority staff and partners to meet young people where they are at, is of utmost importance.

## **Barriers**

In terms of the barriers to young people in accessing help and support from councils, the local authority representatives we spoke to identified that there would be barriers, both known and unknown, and that working closely with others including voluntary sector partners would be vital to identify and help address these barriers.

There are challenges facing local authorities in terms of retention and recruitment of staff, vital to deliver the services that are so needed. Interviewees talked about the need to raise capacity and knowledge amongst staff about what services were, or should be, available to young people experiencing homelessness.

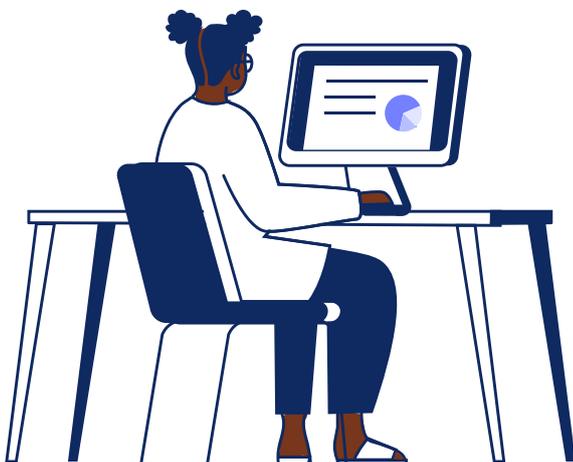
Raising capacity and knowledge among young people and the wider community was also identified as something that could help ensure people access appropriate support when it is needed. Again, this was an area where further collaboration and partnership with the voluntary sector could play a hugely important role, such as signposting support services

and meeting basic needs through day centres.

## Targeted work

Stakeholders highlighted the benefits that could be gained from targeted work in specific areas involving partnership and collaboration. An example of this is the Pan London Care Leavers Compact which aims to ensure consistency and quality in support from local authorities to care leavers, and in which London's Local Authorities are asked to make six commitments to London's Care Leavers:

- London Local Authorities offer a **full council tax exemption for their Care Leavers (18-25)** that live within the borough. (Note: Also strongly encourages LA's to fund the council tax of their Care Leavers living outside of the authority)
- London Local Authorities adopt the principle that no **Care Leaver (18-25) should be found intentionally homeless.**
- London Local Authorities adopt the principle that their Care Leavers up to the age of 25 are to be found as being in **'priority need'** under homelessness legislation. London Local Authorities offer a **rent deposit scheme for their Care Leavers (18-25)** for whom private rented accommodation is assessed as a suitable option.
- London Local Authorities have a **joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services** for Care Leavers in line with good practice advice.
- London Local Authorities become **signatories to the Care Leavers Covenant.**



In the interviews there was an acknowledgement that young people were not always receiving the help and support that they needed and that sometimes there was not enough focus on their specific needs as young people. This idea that young people were not heard, and their needs acknowledged, was a significant element of the service user interviews with the young people at New Horizon.

One voluntary sector representative described how



*“Most of the young people will say they haven’t spoken to a housing officer or they haven’t been given an appointment. They’re waiting to hear back. They’ve left lots of messages, but they’ve spoken to somebody, and they don’t know whether it’s customer services or housing who said we can’t do anything to help you. You’re not priority need. You’re not priority need, even though you’ve told us you’re fleeing domestic abuse, you’re not priority need. Even though you told us you have a diagnosed mental health condition, you’re not priority need. Even though you’re fleeing violence and have a police number or a CHAIN number, or any of those other kind of components.”*  
(Voluntary sector representative).



young people felt ignored or forgotten about through their contact with their local council:

and advise on how to engage with young people:

One aspect that many stakeholders felt required more attention was accepting that many young people had absolutely no safety net and that

In one local authority stakeholder interview, the member of staff talked about how young people informed them that they hadn't received adequate

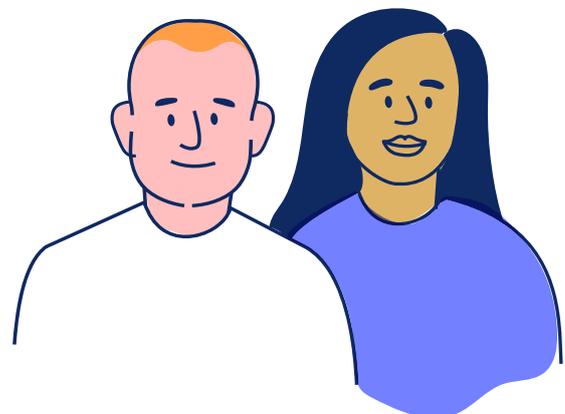
**“We had some feedback from young people in a supported housing scheme that when they came to us for advice about move-on, they weren't given what they felt to be a sympathetic hearing. They weren't giving information they could understand. We didn't have any sort of bespoke guidance.”**  
*(Local Authority representative)*

**“You know the point that I often make is that young people don't have a safety net, and I think that's the stigma that I think can often lead to homelessness.”**  
*(Voluntary sector representative)*

therefore ensuring their needs were met quickly and appropriately was vital:  
In terms of targeting work and support specifically around the needs of young people, many stakeholders referred to the need for more and better housing and housing-related support options. We learned about a number of “live and work” schemes including one run by St Basils, and one recently opened in London by Centrepoint (see the section on best practice examples for more information). Stakeholders also talked about the value of Housing First schemes specific to young people, and developing needs-based assessments of the housing and housing with support needed in the area.

support to help with a transition away from supported housing:  
This interviewee felt that there could be more work

**“And so I do think perhaps there is some collaboration that could be produced, pan-London that would be designed with young people at the heart of it, what their requirements are, and that could almost be provided to all boroughs to use and build upon as a template.”**  
*(Local Authority representative)*



done at a wider level (i.e. Pan London) to help develop

# WHAT WOULD HELP?

We asked all of our interview participants what would help, and what they felt central government, local government and the third sector could do to help improve outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness.

The suggestions were wide ranging and detailed, and we have summarised their recommendations into the following headings:

- **More multi-agency collaboration and coordination.** Design and deliver services that are accessible and work for young people. The voluntary sector has an important role to play in engaging young people.
- **More prevention work and coordination within and across local authorities** – e.g. ensuring access and engagement from family reconnection / mediation services and other early interventions. Within London, further collaboration at a Pan London level, for example building on the Care Leavers Covenant.

- The need for **more targeted interventions to support young people.** More appropriate housing and support solutions such as Housing First / Live and Work schemes.
- Funding– e.g. unfreezing Local Housing Allowance, addressing the inadequate Homelessness Prevention Grant and the ever-increasing costs of Temporary Accommodation.

In the following section we highlight best practice case studies which incorporate some of the recommendations from the local authority and stakeholder interviews.



# 07

## GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

In this section of the report, we have collated some case studies of best practice in the area of youth homelessness. We have found many examples of best practice through our own background research and through interviews with stakeholders during the course of the research.

### MULTI AGENCY WORKING

CASE STUDY	BRISTOL YOUTH MAPS
<b>ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED/PARTNERS</b>	Bristol Youth MAPS is a joint service funded by the council in partnership with the charity organisation 1625 Independent People.
<b>TARGET GROUPS</b>	16–21-year-olds (young people aged up to 24 can be referred by another professional if they meet special criteria for needing youth services)
<b>FUNDING</b>	Bristol City Council
<b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b>	<p>Bristol Youth MAPS is a multi-agency co-located youth homelessness prevention hub which was commissioned by the local authority in October 2017.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Co-location – MAPS enables young people to access a youth-oriented housing adviser in the same place as a statutory homelessness assessment and family work which is much more joined up than previously</li><li>● Improved systems – MAPS also provides a virtual hub connecting youth housing services. Case Review panels enable key partners</li></ul>

<p><b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b></p>	<p>to explore barriers and solutions for “hard-to-house” young people. These developed relationships have led to a much overdue update of the local Referral and Eviction Protocol for young people which has significantly improved the multi-agency response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Helping young people to remain at home – MAPS was set up on the premise that, where safe, young people achieve better outcomes when they remain with their family. Whilst this can be challenging, there have been successes in helping young people to stay at home. Key to this has been mediation work alongside clear messages about the difficult reality of finding housing in Bristol for young people</li> <li>● Evidence of reducing referrals to supported housing, emergency accommodation and numbers of 16 and 17 year olds becoming looked after through homelessness through more work to prevent homelessness</li> </ul>
<p><b>WHAT MAKES IT INNOVATIVE/UNIQUE</b></p>	<p>Effective council and voluntary sector collaboration</p>

**Sources:** What We Do | 1625 Independent People Bristol Charity  
Advice and support for young people | Bristol.gov.uk

<p><b>CASE STUDY</b></p>	<p><b>THE ZONE PLYMOUTH</b></p>
<p><b>ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED/PARTNERS</b></p>	<p>The Zone is part of ‘The Plymouth Alliance’, a partnership of local charities, local NHS services and Plymouth City Council, which provides support for people who have needs in relation to homelessness and may also have support needs around substance misuse, mental health, offending and risk of exploitation.</p>
<p><b>TARGET GROUPS</b></p>	<p>16-24 year olds</p>
<p><b>FUNDING</b></p>	<p>Funded by Plymouth City Council as part of the Plymouth Alliance</p>
<p><b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b></p>	<p>The aim of the Plymouth Alliance is to enable people to access flexible support – the right care, at the right time in the right place.</p> <p>The Zone is a charity which provides free confidential information and support to young people, supporting on average 5,500 young people each year.</p>

<p><b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b></p>	<p>Services are available 5 days a week and offer young people emotional support and information around housing, sexual health, mental health and options available to them as young people. They are also able to signpost and make referrals to more specialist services.</p> <p>ZAP at the Zone (Zone Accommodation Project) based in Plymouth City Centre provides support to young people who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless by offering early intervention and floating support. The service offers information and advice about housing and homelessness, talking young people through their options and helping find accommodation either with family or friends, in supported housing or in the private rented sector. They also offer tenancy support to help young people manage and maintain a tenancy.</p>
<p><b>WHAT MAKES IT INNOVATIVE/UNIQUE</b></p>	<p>Holistic support for young people</p>

Source: Housing and Homelessness | The Zone Plymouth

<p><b>CASE STUDY</b></p>	<p><b>ST BASILS' LIVE AND WORK MODEL, SANDWELL</b></p>
<p><b>ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED/PARTNERS</b></p>	<p><b>Phase 1</b> - St Basils, Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, and construction company partner Equans, who were prepared to undertake a refurbishment project at below market rates, in line with their corporate social responsibility commitment.</p> <p><b>Phase 2</b> - St Basils, Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, Sandwell MBC, Equans, Landaid and other charitable Trusts.</p>
<p><b>TARGET GROUPS</b></p>	<p>18–25-year-olds who are working or in an apprenticeship</p>
<p><b>FUNDING</b></p>	<p>Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust have leased the buildings to St Basils at peppercorn rents for 30 years.</p> <p>Phase 1 comprises 8 x 4 bedroomed student style furnished flats (32 bedspaces) and was completed in 2014 and was funded by voluntary sector empty homes grant from Homes England plus charitable support and building work was delivered at cost.</p> <p>Phase 2 is due for completion in February 2024 and comprises remodelling of 27x 4 bed flats in three separate buildings into 54 self-contained studio and 1 bed apartments. Capital funding was from Homes England and Sandwell MBC section 106 funding, plus charitable contributions from Landaid and other Trusts.</p>

<p><b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b></p>	<p>St Basils Live &amp; Work accommodation offers young people aged 18-25 the opportunity to access high-quality, low-cost housing for up to 2-years or until the day before their 26th birthday.</p> <p>Young people must be working or in an apprenticeship to be offered a tenancy at one of the 86 Live &amp; Work properties at Hallam Close in Sandwell. Rents are set at a discount of more than 50% compared to private tenancies. The Live and Work properties are a 10-minute bus ride or a 20-minute walk from the centre of West Bromwich and 40 minutes from central Birmingham via public transport.</p> <p>The partnership approach focussed on a shared objective of providing young people, who have been homeless or at risk of homelessness, with safe, affordable accommodation and a route into employment initially via apprenticeships with Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, now extended to other employment.</p> <p>The housing aspect of the scheme – provided by St Basils - has involved taking on empty unused buildings (former nurse accommodation) and refurbishing them to offer affordable living accommodation in close proximity to Sandwell General Hospital.</p> <p>St Basils Live &amp; Work accommodation is Supportive rather than Supported accommodation. Tenants are expected to manage their tenancy, job and money without support but St Basils’ on site staff are on hand to provide guidance and to help young people adjust to the demands of living independently.</p>
<p><b>WHAT MAKES IT INNOVATIVE/UNIQUE</b></p>	<p>The model is a ground-breaking approach to providing accommodation which underpins young people’s entry into and sustainment of employment.</p>

**Source:** Live and Work | St Basils  
 How does our multi-award winning Live and Work scheme help young people in the current economic climate? | St Basils  
 How can the Living Rent model enable young people to Live, Work, Earn and Learn? | Commonweal Housing  
 Review and Appraisal of the St Basils / SWBNHST Live and Work Scheme | CfCR

<b>CASE STUDY</b>	<b>CENTREPOINT'S REUBEN HOUSE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMME</b>
<b>ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED/PARTNERS</b>	The project was led by Centrepont in partnership with M-AR-modular build construction company.
<b>TARGET GROUPS</b>	18-24 year-olds who are working or in an apprenticeship
<b>FUNDING</b>	The total cost of the project was £3.9 million. Reuben House was funded by Centrepont, the Greater London Authority, and the Reuben Foundation.
<b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b>	<p>Reuben House, in Peckham, is an independent living programme for working young people aged 18-24 on induction. The accommodation is purpose-built and made of 33 self-contained modular flats. Each flat is 20.5m<sup>2</sup> and has its own kitchen, dining area, bathroom, and space to relax. Reuben House is part of Centrepont's Independent Living programme which aims to provide "high quality, affordable housing alongside our support provision".</p> <p>The accommodation is aimed at young people who are working 30 hours or more per week or an apprenticeship and have low-level support needs. The property charge is capped at one-third of the young person's salary to ensure it is affordable. Young people also receive housing related support and guidance from a Centrepont Independent Living Advisor on budgeting, adjusting to living without support, and move-on plans.</p> <p>Tenants can stay for two years, but this can be extended up to five years on an individual basis.</p> <p>The homes were constructed by the modular build company M-AR. The modular build method reduces construction time by 50%, allowing Centrepont to deliver homes in a cost-effective way. The design is energy efficient and includes solar panels. They hope the annual bills will be less than £300 a year per person.</p> <p>Centrepont is currently fundraising £32m to develop 300 independent living units by 2026.</p>
<b>WHAT MAKES IT INNOVATIVE/UNIQUE</b>	The property charge cap ensures the accommodation is affordable for those under 25 years old in starter roles. Modular build method meaning the homes could be built quickly and efficiently.

**Source:** Independent Living Programme | Centrepont  
 Reuben House, Peckham | MMC Market  
 A new model of housing for young people | Inside Housing  
 Centrepont ILP Peckham | e-architect  
 Prince William opens London housing project offering cut-price rents to youngsters facing homelessness | Big Issue

# CULTURE AND SERVICE STANDARDS

CASE STUDY	ST BASILS POSITIVE PATHWAYS
<p><b>ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED/PARTNERS</b></p>	<p><b>St Basils in partnership with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local authorities</li> <li>• social landlords</li> <li>• homelessness organisations</li> <li>• organisations working with young people</li> <li>• young people</li> </ul>
<p><b>TARGET GROUPS</b></p>	<p>16–25-year-olds</p>
<p><b>FUNDING</b></p>	<p>The Positive Pathways Framework was commissioned by successive governments from St Basils commencing in 2011 and updated in 2015, 2017 and 2020. There are three frameworks: a generic one for preventing youth homelessness; one for preventing homelessness for Care Leavers and one for preventing homelessness for young people in the Criminal Justice System.</p>
<p><b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b></p>	<p>Positive Pathways is a nationwide framework for local authorities and their partners to use to provide a planned approach for homelessness prevention and housing options for young people.</p> <p><b>5 elements of the framework:</b></p> <p><b>1 . Universal information and advice for young people and families</b></p> <p><u>The service:</u> 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.</p> <p><u>Desired result:</u> 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.</p> <p><b>2 . Early help</b></p> <p><u>The service:</u> Early intervention is targeted to reach households where young people are most likely to be at risk of homelessness. Delivery of local services working with young people and families at risk e.g. Troubled Families, Family Support, Youth Services and Youth Offending Services.</p>

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

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

### 3 . Prevention Hub with 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 single access point into locally commissioned supported accommodation and 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 peoples' 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. Flexible outreach support is also available to support young people wherever they live (including in the family home and also Housing First) and can 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 private rented or social housing. 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 more 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 floating support is available for those who need it.

<b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b>	<u>Desired results:</u> Young people are economically active and have suitable homes that they can afford – they can build for their future.
<b>WHAT MAKES IT INNOVATIVE/UNIQUE</b>	<p><b>Designing out homelessness / early intervention</b></p> <p>The model focuses on supporting local authorities and service providers to work together in providing services for young people; rather than considering homelessness and housing in isolation, the model aims to assist joint planning, commissioning, and delivery of services across sectors.</p> <p>It is bespoke to young people and picks up on the other areas of their lives, such as mental and physical health, and education, training, and employment, to support young people to achieve other positive outcomes.</p> <p>The framework can be implemented in a wide range of different contexts - different local authority structures, different housing markets and different geographical areas.</p>

**Sources:** Positive Pathway Framework | St Basils  
 Refreshed Positive Pathway documents launched | St Basils  
 The Positive Pathway Model: A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact (Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, 2017)

<b>CASE STUDY</b>	<b>EAST SUSSEX LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS</b>
<b>ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED/PARTNERS</b>	East Sussex County Council
<b>TARGET GROUPS</b>	Care leavers 16-25
<b>FUNDING</b>	East Sussex County Council
<b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b>	<p>The council identified that young people leaving care are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. However, they could not access support through the East Sussex Rough Sleepers Initiative pathway as many were not sleeping rough.</p> <p>At age 16 conversations start with Personal Advisor or Social Worker to create an individual Pathway Plan.</p> <p>The plan focuses on holistic wraparound support, which includes:</p>

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

### Accommodation

- At 17 ½, a personalised housing plan meeting with housing officer and Personal Advisor to start a housing register application
- Support with a 'staying put' arrangement to remain where you are
- Young Person's Housing Pathway ensures you can access three options and move between them until you are ready to move on to fully independent living:
  1. Low to high levels of supported accommodation
  2. Placement Support workers to help in managing a private or social sector tenancy
  3. Shared student-style accommodation for those in employment, education or training
- Support in a housing crisis which ensures you have somewhere to live up to age 21
- £3000 grant to furnish first property and practical support with furnishing and decorating
- Moving support
- Financial assistance with larger purchases such as white goods
- Safety equipment e.g. fire alarms provided
- First food shop and energy top-up paid ahead of receipt of benefits
- Advice and support on maintaining a tenancy
- Council tax exemption up to 25th birthday

### Emotional health and wellbeing

- 'Health passport' detailing health history
- Specialist counselling and therapy from 16-25
- Support with registering for health services
- Transport costs for hospital/doctors appointments
- Somebody to accompany you for appointments

### Education, training and employment support

- A laptop and Wi-Fi access
- CV, interview skills and finding work support
- Interview clothes and travel to interviews
- Tutoring costs
- English as an additional language classes
- Weekly drop-in support service for NEET care leavers

### For care leavers in school or further education

- Personal education plan with review each term
- Bursary and financial support application help
- Support with housing costs

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

### For care leavers in higher education

- Funding for UCAS applications
- Financial support with attending open days
- Accommodation and moving costs paid
- £2000 bursary
- Graduation costs paid

### For care leavers in training/apprenticeships/employment

- Funding for training certificates or accreditation
- Financial support until first wages
- Funding for travel and equipment
- Support with housing costs
- Work experience or job offer with East Sussex County council may be possible

### Finance support

- Financial advice, money management skills, support to open bank accounts, benefits application, help to obtain National Insurance Number etc
- Emergency crisis support e.g. during benefit sanctions
- Clothing allowance
- Gifts on birthday and Christmas

### Participation in society

- Support with hobbies and personal development
- Official documentation support and funding

### Relationships

- Support with contacting family, previous carers, reconnecting with important people
- Support to understand personal history

## WHAT MAKES IT INNOVATIVE/UNIQUE

Intensive, specialist wraparound support centred on the young person, with emphasis on preparation before they become 18 and support until they are 25

**Sources:** Our local offer for care leavers | East Sussex County Council

# HUB PATHWAYS

CASE STUDY	BIRMINGHAM YOUTH HUB
<b>ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED/PARTNERS</b>	Managed by St Basils, co-located services from Birmingham City Council’s Children’s Services and Housing Department
<b>TARGET GROUPS</b>	16–25-year-olds
<b>FUNDING</b>	The service is commissioned by Birmingham City Council from St Basils with complementary co-located services funded by different means
<b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b>	<p>The objective of the service is to both prevent and relieve homelessness for young people between 16 and 25.</p> <p>St Basils manage the multi-agency Youth Hub in Birmingham which sees over 3,600 young people each year and prevents 91% from experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>The Youth Hub is a national exemplar of multi-agency working in order to prevent youth homelessness.</p> <p>The service works to ensure that every young person between 16–25 is greeted and assessed and receives appropriate assistance to prevent where possible their homelessness and to provide a safe solution where not.</p> <p>The Hub is the single referral point for access to all commissioned accommodation and support services for young people in Birmingham.</p> <p>The Youth Hub works with all young people in housing need, including care leavers, young people in custody and young parents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance in preventing homelessness including family mediation, access to floating support and landlord liaison/negotiation.</li> <li>• Advice and help to apply for a range of housing options, for example, supported lodgings, supported accommodation, private and social housing.</li> <li>• Advice on accessing education, training and employment.</li> <li>• Specialist support services including health needs, drugs and alcohol misuse support and mental health services</li> </ul> <p>When young people access the Youth Hub they have a conversation with staff delivering the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Service. During these conversations workers will identify young people’s needs and begin the process of building a package of support around the young person.</p>

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Where a young person requires housing support they will work with the homelessness assessment team who will conduct a housing needs assessment and develop a personal housing plan with the young person. The team will work with the IAG service throughout the assessment.

### St Basils use an **Accommodation Finding Service**

The PIE approach focuses first on what young people require support with. This means accommodation is matched to need. In addition to the IAG service St Basils run an Accommodation Finding Service from the hub. This service is given a daily list of available accommodation across the city, by multiple different providers. They are able to match accommodation options with need and support young people into housing. They offer further support to young people entering exempt accommodation through their Homelessness transition service.

### **Co-location**

Services located in the Youth Hub include:

- Children's Social Services
- The Department for Work and Pensions
- Adult Social Services
- Housing
- Mental health, and drug and alcohol support
- Domestic abuse

## WHAT MAKES IT INNOVATIVE/UNIQUE

Through the co-location of services young people's needs and rights can be quickly identified and effectively responded to.

The Youth Hub operates within the Positive Pathway approach, which focuses on avoiding housing crisis and ensuring that homelessness is not part of young people's experience. It looks at how to support young people to achieve positive outcomes in other areas of their lives alongside housing – for example in education, training and employment, health and emotional well-being.

**Sources:** Who we are | St Basils  
7-minute briefings Birmingham Youth Hub | Homeless Link

# 08

## RECOMMENDATIONS

AREA OF INFLUENCE	IMPROVING PROCESSES	IMPROVING HOUSING
<p><b>LOCAL AUTHORITY</b></p>	<p><b>LONG TERM:</b> Co-locate council housing and other statutory and voluntary services including mental and physical health, education, training, and advice. Holistic and wraparound support to meet young people where they are. Council housing teams should undertake training on specific needs of young people and how best to support them.</p>	<p><b>SHORT TERM:</b> Young people should be provided with gender/age-appropriate accommodation where possible via needs assessment, with better sharing of facilities across local authorities.</p>
<p><b>LONDON</b></p>	<p><b>MEDIUM TERM:</b> London Councils should help create a pan-London centralised website for young people setting out rights and the options available to them if they become, or are threatened with homelessness. It would identify help available within each borough alongside voluntary support services.</p>	<p><b>MEDIUM TERM:</b> A pan-London reciprocal should be established to ensure underutilised housing stock and void properties can be brought into use for young people, and to ensure more effective sharing of resources and facilities across boroughs.</p>
<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p>	<p><b>SHORT TERM:</b> The Homelessness Code of Guidance should be updated to include a specific chapter on engaging with, and offering exemplar support to, young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.</p>	<p><b>LONG TERM:</b> Government should commit to a national strategy to end youth homelessness with a focus on specific allocations for new housing that meets the needs of young people.</p>

When implementing these recommendations, stakeholders should take care to ensure they are young people centred and co-created with young people who have experienced homelessness.

In this report we have focused on uncovering how local authorities and voluntary services can more effectively work together to improve service standards and responses around youth homelessness. Based on these findings, we have made recommendations organised around three main areas of responsibility: individual Local Authorities, London and National. They cover two important areas: improvements to processes and procedures, and improvements to supply and allocation of housing. We categorise the actions into whether they can be delivered in the short, medium or long term.

We hope these recommendations are both realistic and achievable but have the potential to make a real difference to the experiences of young people experiencing homelessness.

## Our recommendations for local authorities are:

### 01

**Co-location of council housing and other statutory and voluntary services** including mental and physical health, education, training, and advice. Holistic and wraparound support to meet young people where they are. As part of this more holistic support service council **housing teams should undertake training** on specific needs of young people and how best to support them.

- Young people are more likely to engage if support is coherent, readily available, and accessible. Combined / multi agency support hubs should work around the young person, meaning they only

have to tell their story and share their experiences once. As an example, the Birmingham Youth Hub which is commissioned by Birmingham City Council's Children's Services and Housing Department and managed by St Basils. This service works as a single referral point for young people seeking assistance with accommodation and other support services.

- In order to best meet the needs of young people, it is important that local authority housing staff understand the context of young people's lives, the unique problems they face, and also be able to engage in a culturally competent way. To support this, there should be regular training sessions based on the Homelessness Code of Guidance to ensure that housing staff can genuinely and effectively engage with young people.

### 02

**Young people should be provided with gender/age-appropriate accommodation** where possible via needs assessment, with better sharing of facilities across local authorities.

- Many young people we engaged with as part of this research described being placed in shared accommodation with older people, and feeling very isolated, threatened, or unable to maintain the tenancy as a result. There should be needs assessments within local areas to identify the level of need and resourcing. There should also be improved engagement with all departments within a local authority alongside voluntary sector partners and others.



## Our recommendations at a pan London level are:

### 01

London Councils should help create a **pan-London centralised website for young people setting out rights and the options available** to them if they become, or are threatened with homelessness. It would identify help available within each borough alongside voluntary support services.

- Many young people do not know what services are available to them in their local area when they experience difficulties which may lead to homelessness. Even when people have received statutory support (e.g. a local authority) they may not have awareness of the full statutory and non statutory service offer.
- The website should have capacity to focus on a London and a focused local level. It should be user friendly and centralise access to support services around homelessness as well as wider needs such as food, education and training, activities, counselling and wellbeing, relationship support.
- The website should also include resources for professionals working with young people e.g. teachers, youth workers and for parents/families dealing with difficulties in the home. The website would need to be developed and co-produced with young people.

### 02

**A pan-London reciprocal should be established to ensure underutilised housing stock and void properties can be brought into use** for young people, and to ensure more effective sharing of resources and facilities across boroughs.

- Through a pan London agreement there can be better sharing of specialist accommodation across boroughs to help place people in the most appropriate places.

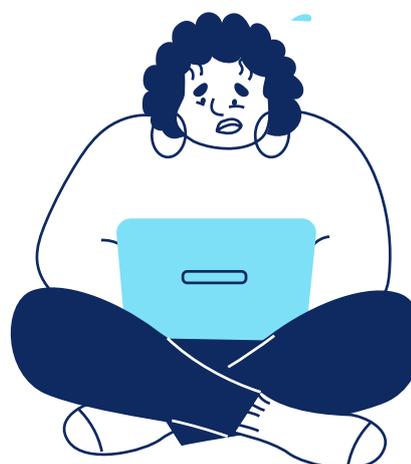
## AFIA'S STORY

Afia has been homeless for 20 days since leaving shared accommodation in north of England. Afia was placed in the shared house by the Local Authority after leaving the care system. She was housed with people often took drugs and tried to abuse her, which she says was bad for her mental health, and she found very stressful. She fled the shared house and travelled to London, where she has friends and better connections. Since coming to London, Afia has been sleeping rough and found New Horizon Youth Centre through Google. Her experience since leaving care has been very difficult, and she expected to receive more support from statutory services.

***"It's hard leaving care because people think you get lots of support from government, but you don't."***

Afia has been in touch with a London local authority, who tried to send her back to the shared house in the north and did not offer any further support. Afia explained that she had to repeat her story over and over again to different people in local authority services, but they constantly gave her the same answer, and nothing changed for her.

Afia thinks that local authorities should support anyone who approaches them for help and not limit it to people with a local connection.



## Our recommendations at a national level are:

### 01

**The Homelessness Code of Guidance should be updated to include a specific chapter on engaging with, and offering exemplar support to, young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.**

- Young people often feel that they are not believed, not treated with respect, and expected to provide impossible proof e.g. of abuse/parental consent/official documentation. Many interviewees described a lack of care and respect for young people and a sense that youth homelessness was not 'serious'.
- There should be guidance on the design and delivery of local homelessness services to young people. The guidance should highlight the specific needs of young people; the often complex, relationship-based factors that can lead to youth homelessness and the associated challenges with documentation, parental consent and safeguarding. This guidance should be co-designed and developed with young people.
- The #Planforthe129k campaign could establish a pledge of good practice, building on the code of guidance. The pledge should be co-designed and developed with young people.



### 02

Government should commit to **a national strategy to end youth homelessness** with a focus on specific allocations for new housing that meets the needs of young people.

- To address the root causes of youth homelessness we need an ambitious national strategy that will provide housing to meet the needs of young people. This needs to include building specialist supported housing for young people, which allows them to live in gender and age-appropriate environments.
- A national strategy to build age-appropriate supported housing for young people that meets their needs. This will require Government funding, and a commitment to build from councils and housing associations.

## CALUM'S STORY

When Calum was growing up his family were constantly re-housed around London. Eventually they were moved out of London, but situations within the family meant Calum felt he could no longer remain living in the family home.

Calum approached his Head of Year at college for help, who asked the council for support on his behalf. The council immediately placed him in a hostel, and after four days they moved him into temporary accommodation for a short period of time. He is now living in long term supported accommodation. Calum feels he had a positive experience, and he values being placed in private accommodation with his own kitchen and bathroom. However, he feels he could have received more support when he first moved into the accommodation, including on practical matters, such as how washing machines work.

# 09

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This research has explored the issue of youth homelessness and local authority services from different perspectives, bringing in both young people's direct experience, and the policy and operational context that local authorities are operating in.

It acknowledges that housing young people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, is a complex issue and aims to bring together an understanding what is happening on the ground in local authorities, and what young people need. At the outset of the research, we aimed to provide workable, viable recommendations for how local authorities can better support young people when they approach their homelessness and housing services.

We have spoken to young people at New Horizon Youth Centre and their lived experience has been integral to informing this work. They told us about their varied experience of finding and receiving support from their local councils, and about the barriers they encountered in making themselves heard and advocating for their needs. They found support most helpful when it was holistic and wide ranging, particularly when advocates from the voluntary sector were involved.

We have also spoken to those working within local authorities in London, as well as representatives of both the voluntary sector and central government. These conversations have highlighted some key thematic areas, including the significant challenges facing local authorities across the country, very prominently in London. It was clear from our engagement with stakeholders that there is enthusiasm from service providers, both voluntary and statutory, to further develop their collaboration through the co-location of services and staff in multi-agency hubs and to explore innovative solutions through new housing and support provision. However, there is also a need for additional funding and resourcing to enable staff to deliver these solutions.

Our recommendations could be summarised into these four main action areas:

- **Consolidated / centralised information – prevention and response to homelessness**
- **Homelessness Code of Guidance for young people**
- **Targeted and appropriate support for 18-25 year olds**
- **Increase the supply of young people's housing**

In all these areas, there is a call for increased coordination, collaboration, and partnership working between local authorities and the voluntary sector. Some examples of best practice have also been included which demonstrate effective and innovative services and approaches. While there will not be a one size fits all solution for all areas and all young people, there should be transferable lessons from these case studies which can be adapted and utilised in different localities.

Ensuring that young people have their voices heard and can access support that meets their needs, both in terms of housing, but also the other areas of their lives that enable them to live their lives to the fullest, is crucial. One young person we spoke to summed this up with the following:



***“At least listen to what we’re saying and not be against us. Be on our side... just listen to us.”***

