

# #YouthHomelessChapter



We are a collective of more than **150** **frontline charities** and **organisations** working with young people – and we are **calling for a youth-specific chapter** in the Government’s new cross-departmental **strategy to end homelessness**.



## Who are we?



Since 2023 we’ve been campaigning to make sure homeless young people’s voices are heard and their needs are met. Our petition asking for a youth strategy to end homelessness had over 15,000 signatures and prompted the first parliamentary debate on youth homelessness in 40 years.


Since the election last year, we’ve spoken to dozens of MPs about the need for a youth chapter in the new cross-departmental strategy to end homelessness and we have generated **support across parliament for this approach**.

We know the government’s committed to getting Britain working, solving the housing crisis and ending rough sleeping – and we want to work with ministers to ensure young people are in those plans too.





## Why a Youth Chapter?



Young people face distinct and often overlooked challenges that put them at risk of homelessness - from family breakdown, trauma and care experience, to lower pay, reduced benefit entitlements and limited access to safe housing. **More than 118,000 young people faced homelessness last year**, another record high. A youth-specific chapter is essential to ensure their unique challenges are addressed.

The strategy should aim to turn off the taps early and reduce homelessness at scale. Over half of rough sleepers in adulthood first experienced homelessness under the age of 25 – which is why targeting support at this stage is one of the most effective ways to prevent long-term homelessness, reduce pressure on public services, and break the cycle.



## What does the evidence say?



Young people may be pushed into homelessness due to violence, abuse and trauma at home or in the care or criminal justice system. At a time when they are required to be socially and financially independent, they are forced to navigate their first steps into adulthood with lower pay than older workers and fewer benefit entitlements than older claimants.

Young people can be supported out of homelessness provided that support is quick and decisive. However, across our services we've seen time and again how young people are left out from the support they deserve when facing homelessness, despite making up around one in five of those approaching Councils for housing support.

The government appears set to continue with an age-blind approach to ending homelessness. Sadly, as recent years have shown, this can only have limited impact when it comes to effectively supporting young people out of homelessness.

There is not just a moral benefit to tackling youth homelessness, but an economic one as well. **Centrepont have estimated that the total annual cost of youth homelessness amounts to an astonishing £8.5 billion.**<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Centrepont – The Cost of Youth Homelessness report



The quantitative and qualitative data proves that preventing youth homelessness will both save money and help harness the talents of a generation of young people. As a collective, we've spent over 18 months calling for a #YouthHomelessChapter, developed in partnership with the sector, to be built into the government's plans to tackle the homelessness crisis.

We have suggested 10 practical actions that could sit within the youth chapter and make a tangible difference in the UK's escalating youth homelessness crisis.

Our policy asks for the strategy to end youth homelessness fall into 3 practical strands:

- Preventing youth homelessness before it happens
- Housing and support for young people facing homelessness
- Getting young people working and ready for independence





# What should be in the #YouthHomelessChapter



## Strand 1: Preventing youth homelessness before it happens



Supporting young people to avoid crises in the first place through schools, families, and councils.

*An early identification programme within schools so those at risk are identified and supported.*

This should be done utilising the ‘Upstream’ early identification model developed for and piloted in the UK by Llamau, later joined by Rock Trust and Centrepont. Upstream prevention programmes assess the risk of individual and family homelessness, signposting those designated as being ‘at risk’ to support interventions such as mediation, financial support and social services. Pilots have shown that 65% of young people flagged as high risk of homelessness through this programme were not known to any other support services.<sup>2</sup>

*Work with young people and the youth homelessness sector to write and implement a youth-specific chapter in the Homelessness Code of Guidance.*

This chapter should clarify the obligations of local authorities at the presentation, initial interview and assessment stage to ensure that all local authorities are aware of what is and is not acceptable practice. In doing this, the chapter should delineate:



<sup>2</sup> Llamau Upstream Cymru ‘A Wales Without Homelessness Begins Upstream’ Report



1. the factors a local authority must consider
2. what constitutes a realistic burden of proof when the Homelessness Code of Guidance states that a local authority must only have reason to believe a person is homeless or at risk to get an assessment. This should cover what forms of evidence or burden of proof is acceptable to require at this early stage of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA).

## **Strand 2: Housing and support for young people facing homelessness**

**Ensuring a supply of genuinely affordable and appropriate housing for young people. This must include better, safer options in place to catch and support young people facing homelessness to sustainably solve their housing issues.**

*Incentivise the development of more social homes, with a particular focus on the housing needs of young people.*

Additionally, there should be a focus on developing social homes on brownfield and city centre sites with consideration of access to important amenities for tenants.

*Safeguard future of supported houses.*

This should be through a funding settlement that acknowledges the increased burdens being placed on the sector (particularly providers of youth services). This must involve the appropriate resourcing to allow for proper accountability and regulation of supported housing so the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act can be implemented and enforced.

*Increase availability of Stepping Stone Accommodation*



Increase the availability of programmes such as Centrepoin't's Independent Living Programme and St Basils' Live and Work schemes by running additional rounds of SHAP (Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme) funding. DLUHC should also allocate specific funding from The Affordable Home Programme 2021 – 2026 for the development of Stepping Stone Accommodation for young people.

### *End the single accommodation age cap, which prevents young people under 35 years old from living alone.*

Many young people who've experienced homelessness or come from minoritised backgrounds need the option to live alone where necessary e.g., if a young person has learning or mental health needs that make sharing untenable.

### *Roll out and implement the positive pathway model nationally.*

This has been developed by St Basils and learning can be taken from the experiences and expertise of local authorities such as Birmingham, Coventry, Solihull and Lambeth, who have already applied this approach. This would enable local authorities, children's services, housing authorities and providers of housing and support to prevent homelessness, address crisis and ensure that there are adequate available housing options.

## **Strand 3: Get young people working and ready for independence**

**Fairer pay and resources so young people can build successful, independent lives and get a helping hand if they experience a setback.**

### *Reducing the housing benefit taper rate*

In order to ensure that young people in supported accommodation are not worse off than young people in other forms of accommodation when accessing employment, we encourage the government to reduce the housing benefit taper rate to 55% to bring it in line with universal credit.



We also recommend that the applicable amount under housing benefit should be increased to £531.11 a month (approximately £125 a week) so that a young person is not subject to a marginal effective tax rate of over 100% and does not, therefore, experience a steep financial cliff edge when working over a certain number of hours. This simple change could be made by adding a separate personal allowance category for young people in supported accommodation, as already exists for employment and support allowance (ESA) claimants or introducing a new premium in their applicable amount.<sup>3</sup>

These changes would incentivise more residents into work and would better enable them to start paying off any debts and to save money, facilitating their eventual move into independent accommodation

### *Introduce a new Youth Independence Payment for young people living independently without family support.*

This would raise their overall Universal Credit entitlement to the rate that over 25 years old receive, supporting them with their living costs, preventing them from getting into arrears and facing homelessness as a consequence

### *Extend having Jobcentre staff located on more supported accommodation sites part time.*

This would better enable young people to attend appointments and to develop a relationship of trust with Jobcentre staff.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Both of these recommendations come from Centrepoin's 'Making Work Pay' briefing

<sup>4</sup> Both recommendations 9 and 10 are from YMCA England & Wales.