

**Ending youth homelessness: Possibilities, challenges and practical solutions**

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## **Executive Summary**

This Think-Piece, commissioned by Centrepoin and carried out by the Universities of York and Heriot-Watt, examines the concept and task of ending youth homelessness in the UK. It involved a desk-top review of statistics and research, three local authority case studies and interviews with experts in youth homelessness in both the statutory and voluntary sector.

### **Background**

Centrepoin's vision is to end youth homelessness. In December 2010, the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness concluded that homelessness could and should be ended by national governments. FEANTSA's campaign to end homelessness in Europe has a specific goal that 'no young person should become homeless as a result of the transition to independent living'.

In the UK, in 2008, the Department for Communities and Local Government announced an aim to end rough sleeping in England by 2012, with a similar commitment made for London by the Mayor of London. At present, there is no government level aim to end youth homelessness.

### **What is the scale of the task?**

Youth homelessness remains a significant issue across the UK. It can be estimated that at least 78-80,000 young people experienced homelessness in 2008/9 across the UK. This includes both young people who are formally accepted as homeless under the statutory definition as well as non-statutorily homeless young people using supported housing services. It also includes an estimated 3,800 young people who slept rough in 2008/9. This number should be treated as a guesstimate as data is incomplete, and whilst it will include some double-counting, it is likely to be an underestimate as it only includes young people in touch with homelessness services.

### **Adopting an aim to end youth homelessness**

Considerable support was expressed, in principle, for adopting an aim to end youth homelessness by professionals working in the sector. It was felt to be morally right to attempt to end youth homelessness in the context of a developed society like the UK, irrespective of the prevailing economic climate. A small number however did not support this aim as they were worried that this would lead to youth homelessness being narrowly defined.

However, commentators were not convinced that such an aim could be realised fully, largely due the underlying causes of youth homelessness rooted in the wider societal context, and the impossibility of eliminating family conflict and relationship breakdown entirely. A certain level of 'frictional' homelessness, whereby a relatively small number of young people might find themselves in a homeless situation for a short period of time, must therefore be expected.

A couple of commentators believed it was more helpful to adopt a wider, more positive, aim

to ensure that there are adequate housing and support options available to enable all young people to make an effective transition to adulthood without experiencing homelessness.

## **Defining ‘ending youth homelessness’**

There was a broad consensus that any aim to end youth homelessness would need to be broken down into specific, comprehensible and achievable objectives.

It was important that any such aim should clearly state which particular aspects of youth homelessness were being addressed. There was some concern that, if care was not taken, that the aim of ending youth homelessness could focus too narrowly on specific aspects of the problem and could lead to other important dimensions of youth homelessness being ignored.

We would propose the following set of objectives, inspired by parallel attempts to end rough sleeping and by international developments in this field:

- No young person should sleep rough for more than one night once in contact with an appropriate statutory or voluntary sector agency.
- Young people should not have to stay in emergency accommodation for longer than an agreed specified period (for example, three months).
- Young people should not remain in transitional accommodation when it is appropriate for them to move onto more independent accommodation.
- All young people leaving an institutional setting (care, hospital, prison) should have a suitable housing destination, with relevant support, before discharge.
- All young people who cannot remain in the parental home should be offered suitable accommodation and support within a defined pathway plan to independence.

Local authorities, in collaboration with statutory and voluntary sector partners, should plan how these objectives will be reached as part of a youth housing strategy (see below).

## **What kind of service network is needed to end youth homelessness?**

The research identified a need for local areas to draw up a housing strategy for young people. This would encompass action required *to prevent* and *address* youth homelessness, but within a broader remit of ensuring that local housing markets, including both private and social housing provision, are able to respond to the housing needs of young people.

Considerable progress has been made in preventing youth homelessness in recent years, however this agenda could be developed further, and commence at an earlier age. Most specifically, there was a call for more support for parents of teenagers to enable them to house and/or support their children more effectively. This support should include peer and user-led support as well as specialist parenting services.

Welfare benefit arrangements for families with older teenagers still at home should be reviewed. We must be alert to the possibility that recent welfare changes – particularly with respect to the up-rating of non-dependent deductions within Housing Benefit and Housing Benefit caps – may make it even more difficult for some young people to remain living at home in low income households. Extended family kinship arrangements could also be better

supported. More generally, young people need access to appropriate housing advice and information at the earliest stage possible.

One of the clearest messages arising from the research was a call for the development of 'respite' arrangements, whereby young people could move to safe, high quality accommodation for a short period of time to give them and their families a 'breather', and provide a supportive environment for all parties to rebuild their emotional resilience and renegotiate relationships.

However, not all young people will be able to remain in the parental home until they are in a position to support themselves independently. This means that affordable and appropriate housing options need to be available at the local level for some young people to 'move-out' without the need for them to become homeless. Parents are also more likely to support their children for an extended period if they are aware that options might become available for young people at some stage.

Part of this should involve a re-examination of the role of the transitional accommodation sector. This sector is particularly important for those in the youngest age groups as they are least likely to be ready to live independently. The sector, working with national and local government, need to develop a new housing offer for young people that both provides sustainable, quality housing for a specified period and appropriate move-on opportunities. Young people undertaking further education or apprenticeships should also be offered student-style accommodation similar to that available to those going to Universities. Transitional accommodation should be affordable to young people; this is likely to require the design of new funding mechanisms to keep both rent and service charge elements at an affordable level for young people.

There is also a need to develop housing and support pathways that will allow young people to trial independence and move between more and less supportive environments. Ideally, young people should be welcome to return to previous accommodation places they have stayed in. Mechanisms should be developed to offer young people 'second chances' in housing allocations, recognising their age and level of maturity.

Particularly in light of the acute shortage of social rented tenancies in many parts of the country, more work is required so that the private rented sector can provide a good housing offer to young people on low incomes. Specific accreditation schemes and social letting agencies are likely to be part of the response here, as well as tenancy training and support to new tenants. However, it needs to be acknowledged that many young people who were brought up in social housing aspire to living in this type of provision themselves; and that this sector will always be important for the most vulnerable households and families. Whilst expectations may have to be moderated, this is only likely to occur with the development of affordable alternatives.

In an ideal network, there would be no need for a statutory response to homelessness. However, as long as youth homelessness does continue, even if it is at a much reduced level, there is a strong argument for offering young people a bespoke service, targeted on their needs and staffed by those expert in working with this age group, backed up by specialist emergency accommodation.



Finally, the ongoing provision of effective support services to assist young people to achieve independence will be essential if homelessness is to be eradicated or minimised. All young people need trusted adults to guide them towards adulthood. Disadvantaged young people at risk of homelessness often miss out on much of this support. Tenancy support is particularly important for young people with no or little experience of living independently. The availability of specialist health and care services, including mental health services, for young people is also key. There may also be considerable value in long term mentoring schemes which could be provided within the third sector. Ideally, trusted adults or mentors should not be tied to any one provision, nor be time limited, but should be able to support young people, as needed, throughout the transition to adulthood.

# 1 Introduction

This 'Think-Piece' is designed to generate debate as to whether youth homelessness can be ended in the UK. This short chapter introduces the work undertaken, outlining the reason why the Think-Piece is being commissioned now, and detailing the approach taken to the review.

## Background

The jury concludes that homelessness is a grave injustice and violation of fundamental human rights that can and should be ended.

(Jury of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness, 2011, p.2)

Since its inception, Centrepoin't's vision has been to end youth homelessness. In the last couple of years, the aim of ending homelessness has been increasingly debated and adopted by a variety of leading charitable organisations and governments nationally and internationally. Recently, the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness<sup>1</sup> concluded that homelessness could and should be ended by national governments, supported by an EU-wide homelessness strategy. This builds on the 2008 European Parliament Written Declaration on ending street homelessness across Europe by 2015. FEANTSA's existing campaign on 'Ending Homelessness' throughout Europe has a specific goal that 'no young person should become homeless as a result of the transition to independent living'. Outside of Europe, the United States has for some time had a federal plan to end 'chronic homelessness' – recently expanded to include other forms of homelessness – and Finland has a national strategy to end all forms of homelessness. Closer to home, in 2008 Communities and Local Government announced an aim to end rough sleeping in England by 2012 (DCLG, 2008), with a similar commitment made for London by the Mayor of London.

However, whilst these aims are being increasingly adopted, there is a lack of analysis around what 'ending homelessness' really means or whether it is achievable. This Think-Piece seeks to address this gap by examining critically the concept, and potential practice, of 'ending youth homelessness', and contrasting it to more mainstream approaches of addressing or 'managing' youth homelessness.

The available evidence indicates that youth homelessness remains a significant issue across the UK. A recent review of the evidence commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation / Centrepoin't estimated that about 75,000 young people were affected by homelessness in 2006-7 (Quilgars *et al*, 2008). The review concluded that substantial progress had been made in addressing youth homelessness in the last decade, with the development of a range of services to assist young people in housing need, as well as important legislative changes in both housing and social care. Nonetheless, the review still recorded some significant areas of weakness and a number of future priority areas were identified, including the extension of the homelessness prevention agenda, a reconsideration of the role of specialist temporary accommodation for young people, and addressing the barriers experienced in finding appropriate longer-term housing. However, like other research, the review did not explicitly

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<sup>1</sup> The Consensus Conference was an official event organised by the 2010 Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) and held on 9-10 December 2010. FEANTSA (the European Federation of Organisations Working with Homeless People) coordinated the process.

consider the possibility of ending youth homelessness and what this might mean for policy and practice developments.

This present Think-Piece has been undertaken at a period of significant political and socio-economic change. The context is one of almost unprecedented scaling back of public expenditure across many welfare areas. The aftermath of recession and the continuing financial crisis is likely to have a disproportionate effect on young people in terms of unemployment and also cut backs in welfare spending. Recent changes to the Local Housing Allowance, a planned rise in the Shared Accommodation Rate until the age of 35 and abolition of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) are all likely to affect marginalised young people adversely. The unringfencing of Supporting People funding, which is the most significant funder of specialist accommodation and housing related support for vulnerable young people, has already led to quite severe cutbacks in the funding of services in many areas of the UK (Inside Housing, 28 January 2010). More broadly, the 'non-statutory' nature of many youth services may render them particularly vulnerable to funding cuts as local authorities seek significant savings. This context is of considerable concern when considering ending youth homelessness given that youth homelessness grew substantially in the late 1980s/ early 1990s, much of which was explained by socio-economic factors (Evans, 1996). It is likely that some provision for potentially homeless young people is now firmly embedded in policy and practice, especially where legal changes have been implemented (for example, the statutory homelessness response for 16 and 17 year olds and reforms to the support available for care leavers). However, within the present difficult context, it is even more important to consider the potential for ending youth homelessness in the UK.

## **Approach of the study**

The Think-Piece sought to answer two key questions:

### *1. How can 'ending' youth homelessness realistically be defined?*

This part of the project explored the present debates on 'ending' homelessness and the forms that they have taken to date. It also sought to develop what the concept of ending youth homelessness really means. For example, in theories of full employment a certain level of frictional unemployment is presumed (that is, the flow of people in and out of jobs and the likely short periods of unemployment between positions). Could homelessness be said to be ended even if housing insecurity persists for certain groups in certain circumstances (for example, before services had a chance to intervene)? Would stays in foyers or other forms of transitional accommodation count as homelessness?

### *2. What would the service network look like in a local authority area that had managed to eliminate youth homelessness?*

This second part of the project examined the housing and support 'pathways' that would be available for young people leaving the family home (or other situations, including care or institutional provision) in a local authority area that would obviate the need for people to sleep rough, 'sofa surf', utilise unsuitable forms of hostel provision, etc. It examined the role of the statutory homelessness system, wider preventative agenda, and the respective roles of local authorities, the third sector, parents, young people and the wider community. The research utilised three main methods:

1. *A review of policy developments/ directives on 'ending' homelessness and key literature on youth homelessness.*

Published policy documents on ending homelessness, originating from both the UK and elsewhere in the developed world, were reviewed in detail. Recently published key literature on youth homelessness was also identified and reviewed to inform the conceptual thinking on ending youth homelessness, as well as alerting the research team to any significant policy and practice developments.

2. *An analysis of secondary sources of data on youth homelessness*

This part of the research updated the previous estimates of the scale of youth homelessness (Pleace & Fitzpatrick, 2004; Quilgars *et al*, 2008). It utilised the homelessness data in the UK (PIE, HL1, WHO etc) as well as Supporting People data.

3. *Qualitative work: Interviews with national experts, service providers and young people*

Eight detailed telephone interviews were undertaken with key national experts on youth homelessness in both the charitable and statutory sector. These were designed to discuss present and future policy needed to eradicate youth homelessness, including a discussion of conceptual issues as well as service delivery issues such as the provision of effective support services that young people are likely to need if they are to avoid homelessness.

In addition, three case studies of local authorities with an acknowledged track record in responding to youth homelessness were undertaken. Different types of local authorities were selected including one London Borough (Case Study 1), a large city (Case Study 2) and a predominately rural area (Case Study 3). In each case study, a lead service manager was interviewed and a focus group of key players was convened to discuss the practical steps required to work towards ending youth homelessness, and the extent to which they believed this would be an appropriate and/or realistic aim. As part of this, participants were asked to reflect on a series of 'vignettes' (standardised 'typical cases') of young people at risk of homelessness to explore what the end of youth homelessness might mean for particular sub-groups of young people.

In addition, a small focus group of young people was arranged by Centrepoint where the researcher was able to discuss some of the arising issues from the research.

## **The report**

The report is presented in five chapters. Chapter Two examines 'youth homelessness', both in terms of its definition and examining the scale of youth homelessness. Chapter Three presents an international review of existing debates on 'ending' homelessness, providing an overview of the key themes emerging from these debates. Chapter Four considers the extent to which ending youth homelessness in the UK is realistic or aspirational, as well as the nature of service networks that would be required to attain this, or work towards any such aim. The final chapter presents the conclusions of the Think-Piece.

## 2 Defining and measuring ‘youth homelessness’

This chapter begins by exploring what is meant by ‘youth homelessness’. Without an understanding of the definition of youth homelessness it is impossible to enter into a discussion about ending it. Following a review of definitions, the chapter moves on to explore current levels of youth homelessness using the available data from government agencies and third sector organisations, covering statutory homelessness, non-statutory homelessness and young people sleeping rough. An estimate for the numbers of young people affected by homelessness in 2008/9 is provided, along with a critique of the limitations of this figure.

### Defining youth homelessness

#### *Defining ‘youth’*

Youth is a life phase which occurs at the intersection of childhood and adulthood and whilst partly dictated by biological processes, it is also heavily determined by social and cultural processes which differ over time and place. With regards to ‘youth homelessness’, commentators have tended to focus on housing need as affecting those aged between 16 and 24 (inclusive), reflecting a raft of legislative and common understandings as to when a young person can potentially live independently from their parents, and welfare policy that provides reduced income related assistance until the age of 25 (Quilgars *et al*, 2008). The age of majority, however, is only reached at the age of 18 and statutory homelessness assistance is enhanced for 16 and 17 year olds in recognition that they remain ‘minors’<sup>2</sup>. In terms of the upper end of the age scale, it should be noted that empirical evidence suggests that youth transitions are becoming more extended. Data indicates that young people are staying with their parents until an older age and delaying forming independent households (Smith, 2009). It is important that the age range being considered in ‘youth homelessness’ debates is made explicit, as there may be implications for both measuring it and what situations may be counted as ‘homeless’. The clearest example here is whether young people, particularly those aged 16 and 17, living in supported accommodation, should be considered as homeless or not. This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

#### *Defining ‘homelessness’*

‘Homelessness’ is a relative term and one that is defined differently in statute as well as in common parlance. Arguably, the most systematic and robust typology of homelessness situations available is ETHOS (European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion), which was developed under the auspices of FEANTSA, the European Federation of organisations working with homeless people. This typology is utilised extensively in Europe, although it is relatively little used in the UK. ETHOS is particularly useful for comparative research as it is designed to look at homelessness in a way that detaches the social problem from specific national contexts. However, ETHOS can be (usefully) challenging in the UK context as it does not explicitly encompass UK statutory

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<sup>2</sup> Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, national governments should protect children (defined as under the age of 18 unless majority is attained earlier) including ensuring a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development ‘in accordance with national conditions and within their means’ and ‘particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing’ (Article 27; 3).

homelessness definitions.

The typology has its starting point that a ‘home’ is understood as possessing three main domains: a physical domain where a person and their family can exercise exclusive possession; a social domain where people are able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations, and a legal domain whereby a person has a legal entitlement to occupation. Homelessness could be considered to occur as a result of the lack of one or more of these domains. The typology identifies four main types of situation which a person may face: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing, and inadequate housing (Table 2.1). The first two categories are more likely to be described as ‘homelessness’ whilst the second two are more likely to be described as housing exclusion.

**Table 2.1: The ETHOS typology of homelessness and housing exclusion, and availability of data sources on young people in each of the categories**

ROOFLESS	1	People living rough	Partial and poor data	Some data collection in Scotland and London, but data are poor elsewhere
	2	People staying in a night shelter	Mixed data	Good quality data for England in respect of services receiving local authority funding but not elsewhere. Some risk of double counting. Numbers of statutorily homeless households in temporary accommodation is recorded, but age data not available for Wales or Northern Ireland
HOUSELESS	3	People in accommodation for homeless people (including homeless hostels, temporary accommodation and transitional supported accommodation)	Mixed data	
	4	People in women’s shelters (refuges)	Mixed data	
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants	No data collection	Not regarded as homeless in UK
	6	People due to be released from institutions (prisons, hospitals and children’s homes) who are at risk of homelessness due to support needs and people who are unable to move on from institutions due to lack of suitable move on housing)	Partial data	Not collated at national level and only restricted information collected
	7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness i.e. in supported accommodation, including those unable to move on from supported housing due to lack of suitable accommodation)	Mixed data	Data for England but not elsewhere, some risk of double counting
INSECURE	8	People living in insecure accommodation (squatting, illegal camping, sofa surfing or sleeping on floors, staying with friends or relatives)	No data collection	No systematic data collection.
	9	People living under threat of eviction	Partial data	Legal statistics do not separate out young people
	10	People living under threat of violence	Partial data	Criminal justice records are confined to recorded offences and do not separate out young people
INADEQUATE	11	People living in temporary / non-standard structures	Partial data	No systematic data collection
	12	People living in unfit housing	Partial data	National surveys from which need can be projected by age, but restricted to samples that can only be analysed at regional level
	13	People living in extreme overcrowding	Partial data	

ETHOS provides a useful starting point from which to discuss the range of different housing problems that a young person may find themselves in, encompassing many forms of housing need, including what is often referred to as 'hidden homelessness'. However, it is not perfect and raises further definitional issues when considering the housing position of young people. For example, it groups homeless hostels with transitional supported accommodation that may offer very different types of accommodation settings to young people. Recently, it has been suggested that it may be useful to develop an ETHOS specifically for young people (Quilgars, 2011); this will be considered further later.

The definition of homelessness was also discussed with young people in the focus group (see Chapter 1). Young people explained that homelessness was more than just the lack of a house, it was about having a lack of stability and proper base from which to lead their life. Importantly, it was also about a lack of support and not having family around you. It was also feeling tired and frustrated and ending up in conflict with people around you. It was also associated with having a lack of money and literally not being able to afford essentials like food.

## **Measuring youth homelessness**

### *Limitations of current data*

Table 2.1 also indicates the relative paucity of data available on youth homelessness in the UK. Whilst ETHOS provides a basis from which homelessness can begin to be counted, it also reveals the significant gaps in our current data collection. There are several dimensions of youth homelessness and housing exclusion among young people about which there is currently little or no information for the UK, including the numbers of young people living in insecure accommodation, in temporary or non-standard structures, and those living under threat of eviction or violence. In terms of the numbers of young people living in situations of overcrowding and unfit housing it is only possible to produce projections based on survey data.

In the recent JRF/ Centrepoint review of youth homelessness (Quilgars *et al*, 2008), the available data on youth homelessness was used to provide an estimate of the number of young people experiencing homelessness in 2006/7 (75,000). Below, the same exercise is undertaken providing an updated figure for 2008/9, the last year for which full data was available. As will be seen, the estimate only covers some aspects of youth homelessness, and also has a number of other limitations.

### *Annual levels of youth homelessness*

Some data is available in the UK on three groups of homeless young people:

- Young statutorily homeless households who have been found unintentionally homeless and in priority need (with data on presentations of all young people available in Scotland and Northern Ireland). [This does not relate to any specific ETHOS category, rather young people may be in a range of homeless situations when presenting to the local authority including sleeping rough, living in hostels, staying with friends or family or be under threat of eviction etc];

- Non-statutorily homeless young people using hostels or supported accommodation [ETHOS category 2/3 above];
- Young people sleeping rough [ETHOS category 1].

### The numbers of young people experiencing statutory homelessness

Table 2.2 shows that approximately<sup>3</sup> 5,363 young people were accepted as statutorily homeless because they were aged 16-17 in 2009/10<sup>4</sup>. This was approximately half the number of young people compared to 2005/6 (10,424), with the figures showing that virtually all of this fall was due to reductions in the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds being accepted in England. It is widely acknowledged that this fall has occurred following the introduction of the preventative approach to homelessness in England.

**Table 2.2: Annual numbers of young people aged 16-17 accepted as statutorily homeless (unintentionally homeless and in priority need) (United Kingdom)**

Years	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
2005-2006	7,444	2,136	681	163	10,424
2006-2007	5,652	1,871	686	128	8,337
2007-2008	4,294	1,853	550	151	6,848
2008-2009	3,590	2,346	527	134	6,597
2009-2010	2,358	2,356	500	149	5,363
Total 05/06-09/10	23,338	10,562	2,944	725	37,569

Source: Reported and Grossed P1E Statistics (England), HL1 statistics (Scotland), WHO-12 statistics (Wales), Northern Ireland Housing Executive. England, Scotland and Wales place 16-17 year-olds in priority need or preference groups on the basis of their age, whereas Northern Ireland does not. **Partly estimated** due to some data not being available.

In addition, Table 2.2 shows that approximately<sup>5</sup> 2,122 young people were accepted as statutorily homeless because they were care leavers or at risk of exploitation in England, Scotland and Wales in 2009/10. Northern Ireland does not have this priority need category and hence there are no statistics. Here, the overall numbers for Great Britain have not changed much over the last five years, but the numbers of young people accepted for these reasons in England has reduced over this period, but has increased in Scotland.

<sup>3</sup> This table is mainly derived from actual statistics, but is based partially on estimates, because full data were not always available for 2009/10 at the time of writing.

<sup>4</sup> The recent Southwark Judgement determined that the purpose of the 2002 changes to the homelessness legislation were to provide accommodation to 16 and 17 year olds who did not fall under Section 20 of the Children Act. Social services departments are not allowed to divert their duty towards a child eligible for assistance under Section 20 to a housing authority. The P1E data for England include young people accepted under the homelessness legislation, not those young people who have been assessed by social services and found to be owed a duty under Section 20, i.e. if a homeless 16-17 year old is referred to social services, found to be owed a duty under the Children Act, they may not be recorded as a statutorily homeless household and therefore not appear in these statistics.

<sup>5</sup> Again, this table is mainly derived from actual statistics, but is based partially on estimates, because full data were not available for 2009/10.



**Table 2.3: Annual numbers of young people accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need: care leavers or at risk of sexual or financial exploitation (Great Britain)**

Years	England <sup>1</sup>	Scotland <sup>2</sup>	Wales <sup>3</sup>	Great Britain
2005-2006	901	1,125	170	2,196
2006-2007	732	1,172	142	2,046
2007-2008	586	1,197	125	1,908
2008-2009	490	1,440	143	2,073
2009-2010	322	1,622	178	2,122
Total	3,031	6,556	758	10,345

1) Care leavers aged 18-20 only 2) Aged 18-24 3) Aged 18-20 only Source: Reported and Grossed P1E Statistics (England), HL1 statistics (Scotland), WHO-12 statistics (Wales) **Partially estimated** due to some data not being available.

Table 2.4 shows an estimate<sup>6</sup> of 33,499 households headed by a young person aged between 16 and 24 (25 in Northern Ireland) who were found statutorily homeless during 2009/10. This estimate includes households containing children (including couples with children, lone parents or where a person in the household is pregnant) as well as people accepted under the priority need groups above (Table 2.1 and 2.2) and other priority need groups. This estimate is derived from P1E and HL1 statistics on the age of the heads of households accepted as statutorily homeless. Table 2.4 shows that youth homelessness is not confined to single people, with the majority of young households accepted under the homelessness legislation being young families. The Table also shows that there has been an overall reduction in the numbers of young people being accepted as statutorily homeless over the period 2005/6 to 2009/10, with this reduction mainly accounted for by reductions in England (and with the numbers rising in Scotland).

**Table 2.4: Annual numbers of statutorily homeless households (unintentionally homeless and in priority need) in which the applicant was a young person (United Kingdom)**

Years	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
2005-2006	36,765	9,447	3,203	1,052	50,467
2006-2007	29,937	9,132	2,927	1,079	43,075
2007-2008	24,636	11,986	2,928	2,473	42,023
2008-2009	21,270	12,601	2,698	2,450	39,019
2009-2010	15,607	12,984	2,482	2,426	33,499
Total	128,215	56,150	14,238	9,480	208,083

Source: Reported and Grossed P1E Statistics (England), HL1 statistics (Scotland), WHO-12 statistics (Wales), Northern Ireland Housing Executive. England, Scotland and Wales place 16-17 year-olds in priority need or preference groups on the basis of their age, whereas Northern Ireland does not. **Partly estimated** due to some data not being available at the time of writing.

Analysis of homelessness acceptances revealed that there was little difference in the rate at which different types of local authority accepted young people as statutorily homeless, however as expected, the typical absolute number of acceptances by a London borough or a unitary authority were much greater than those in district councils.

<sup>6</sup> Since the criteria for acceptance differ under the various pieces of homelessness legislation in the UK, the estimates shown in Table 2.4 should be regarded as a broad comparison.

As noted above, Scotland and Northern Ireland collect information on the types of households *presenting* as homeless (as well as acceptances). These data give us an overview of the extent to which young people in housing need are approaching public sector services for help in these two countries. The differences between the number of presentations and the numbers accepted as homeless are marked.

In 2008/9, 7,746 households headed by someone aged 16-25 sought assistance under the homelessness legislation in Northern Ireland, with 2,453 being accepted as homeless<sup>7</sup>. This meant that just under one third of households headed by someone under 25 that sought assistance were accepted (32%). Overall, households headed by young people represented 42% of the 18,076 presentations in Northern Ireland.

In Scotland, in 2009/10, 15,209 households without children headed by someone aged under 25 approached a local authority for assistance and 9,010 were accepted as statutorily homeless (59%). Another 5,123 households, also headed by someone under 25, but containing one or more children also sought assistance and 75% (3,874) were accepted. Overall, Scotland saw 20,332 presentations by households headed by a young person, this represented 36% of the 56,914 households that presented and about whom a decision was made during 2009/10<sup>8</sup>.

In England and Wales data on the characteristics of the households presenting as homeless are not collected (only the number of households presenting). Taking 2008/9 as an example (the last year for which data for Wales are currently available), there were 12,837 presentations in Wales and 112,900 presentations in England. If these households were headed by young people at a similar rate to that found in Northern Ireland, then some 5,391 would have been headed by someone aged 25 or under in Wales and some 47,418 households would have been headed by someone aged 25 or under in England. If rates more closely mirrored the lower levels reported in Scotland, then some 4,621 Welsh households and some 40,644 English households headed by someone aged under 25 would have approached statutory services for assistance in 2009/10. These estimates are summarised in Figure 2.1.

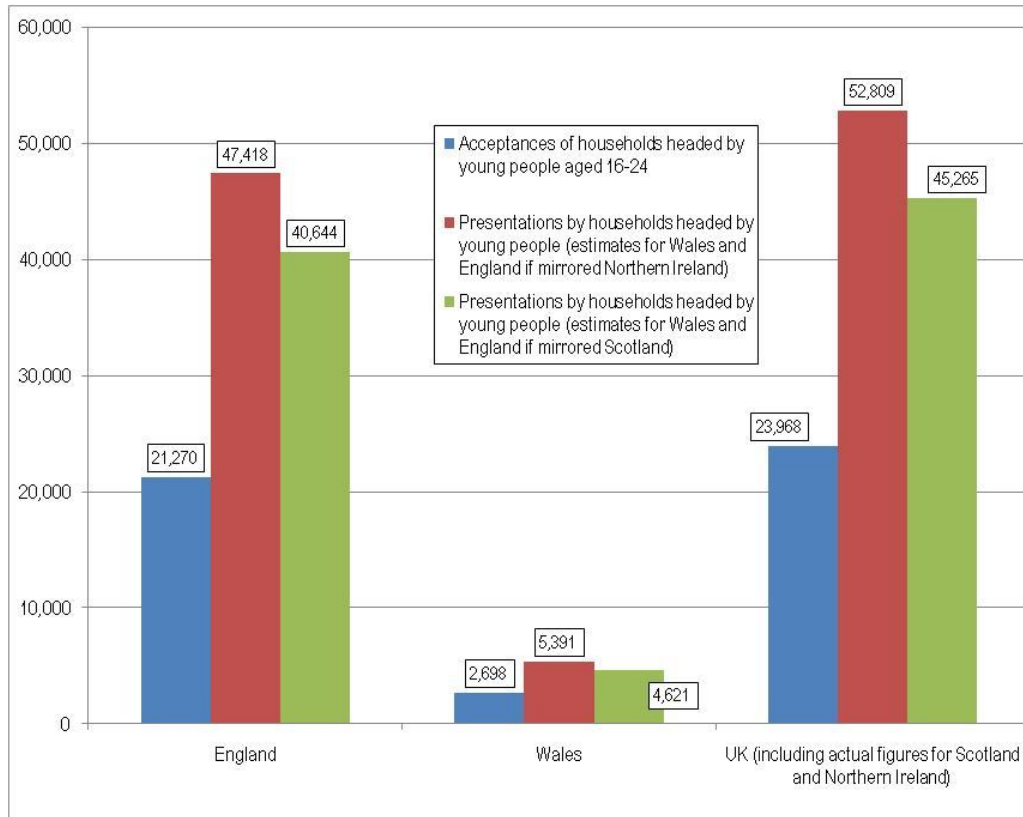
Those households that were not accepted were, of course, not necessarily homeless. However, a proportion of the young people presenting are likely to have been in housing need under one of the ETHOS categories, or may have been assessed as being ‘intentionally’ homeless or not having the required local connection for service receipt. Figure 2.1 therefore suggests that the levels of housing need among young people are likely to be higher than covered by the statutory homelessness statistics.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: Council for Homeless in Northern Ireland, 2010. Includes households containing children. Most recent statistics available at time of writing.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Scottish Government 2011.

**Figure 2.1: Actual and estimated extent of households headed by young people presenting to statutory agencies as homelessness compared to acceptances of households (England and Wales, based on 2008/9 data the most recent available at the time of writing).**



### Non statutory youth homelessness

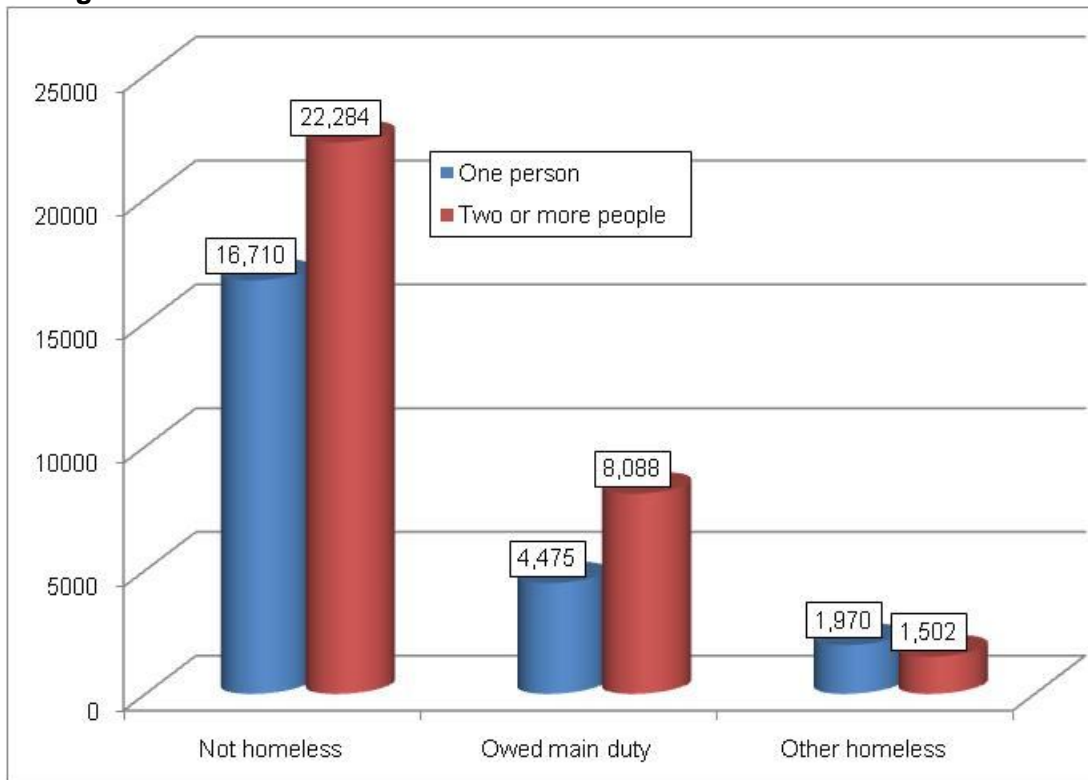
Data on non-statutory forms of youth homelessness are limited. There are essentially two main data sources of any size:

- the CORE and the SCORE systems covering new social rented lets in England and Scotland, respectively, and;
- the client record system that was part of monitoring the (former) Supporting People programme in England.

CORE data for England show that in 2008/9<sup>9</sup>, a total of 3,472 households headed by young people who were recorded as 'homeless' but *not* statutorily homeless were housed by social landlords in England (Figure 2.2). By contrast, statutorily homeless households headed by someone under 25 represented 12,563 of social lets in England during 2008/9, more than three and a half times the level of lets to non-statutorily homeless households headed by someone aged under 25. In addition, 38,994 new social lets were made to households headed by young people who were *not homeless* in 2008/9, around two and a half times the number of lets made to homeless young people.

<sup>9</sup> The most recent data available at the time of writing.

**Figure 2.2: New social housing lets to households headed by someone aged under 25 in England in 2008/9.**



Source: CORE Returns

Setting these figures in a broader context, the 55,029 new lets to households headed by young people in 2008/9 represented 24% of total new social housing lets made in England (225,826). Looking specifically at youth homelessness, just under 6% of all new lets were to statutorily homeless households headed by a young person and just under 2% of lets were to non statutorily homeless households headed by a young person.

The activity shown in SCORE during 2008/9<sup>10</sup>, which records new social lets in Scotland, was not dissimilar to that recorded in England. Lets to households headed by young people constituted a slightly smaller proportion of all lets (3,974 lets out of 20,810: 19%). Lets to statutorily homeless households headed by young people again outnumbered those to non statutorily homeless households (1,474 lets compared to 745). In overall terms, lets to non statutorily homeless households headed by a young person represented just under 4% of all new social rented lets in Scotland, with lets to young person headed households that were statutorily homeless accounting for 7%. As in England, the great bulk of social rented lets were made to other types of household.

The other data source on non statutorily homeless households is the client record data collected for the (former) Supporting People programme in England. At the time of writing, only the 2008/9 data were available for analysis, and equivalent data were not collected in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. The data covered households making use of housing support services, i.e. supported housing, foyers, hostels and tenancy sustainment, floating support, outreach and resettlement services in England. It is important to note that these figures, because they are based on anonymised data, are likely to include some double-

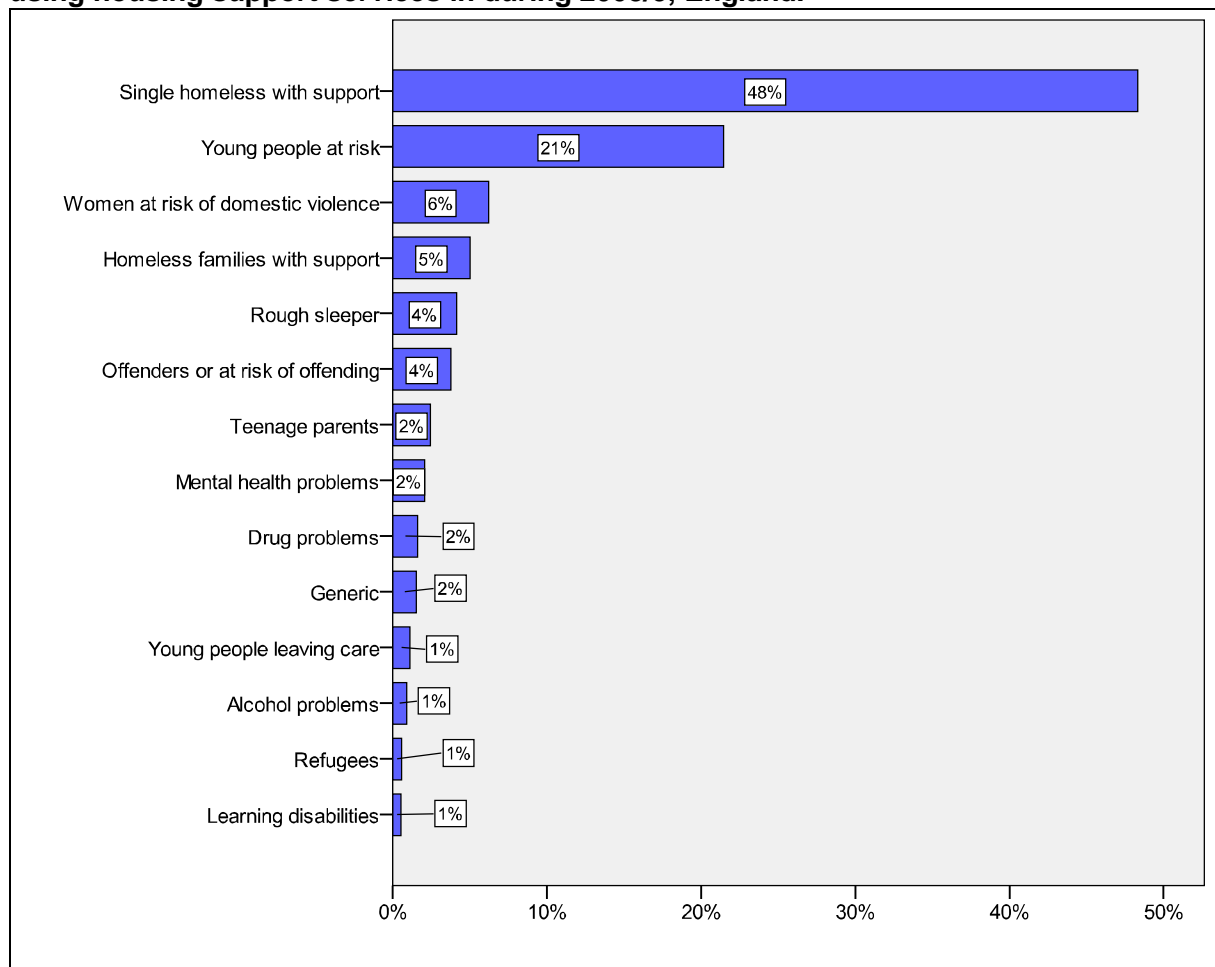
<sup>10</sup> Most recent data available at time of writing

counting (i.e. it is not possible to be certain to what extent households made use of two or more services during 2008/9).

During 2008/9, 32,900 people aged under 25 and classified as non-statutorily homeless used Supporting People services in England. A further 22,185 people aged under 25 and classified as statutorily homeless households used the services.

Figure 2.7 shows that nearly half (48%) of the young people were described by housing support service providers as falling into the client group of ‘single homeless people with support needs’<sup>11</sup>. The other primary client group into which service providers quite often placed non statutorily homeless households headed by young people, was ‘young person at risk’, i.e. someone who would be at heightened risk of abuse or ill treatment by others because their youth makes them inherently vulnerable (21% of households). Other classifications of primary need were less common and it is apparent from Figure 2.3 that housing support service providers were presented with needs ranging from support requirements linked to domestic violence, having a history of offending and being a young family.

**Figure 2.3: Primary client group of non statutorily homeless people aged under 25 using housing support services in during 2008/9, England.**

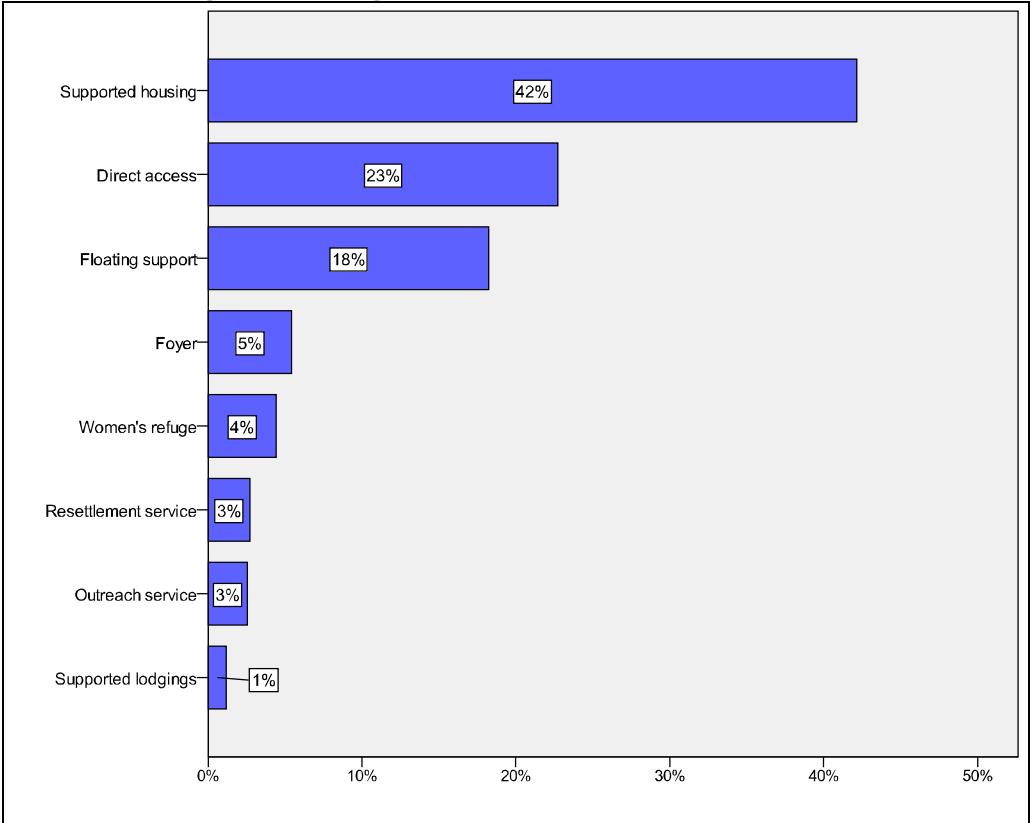


Source: Client Record 2008/9.

<sup>11</sup> Supporting People providers are asked to record the ‘primary’ client group of each household using their service.

It is also possible to look at the range of housing support services that young non statutorily homeless people were receiving. As would be expected (Figure 2.4) the bulk of service use was supported housing (42% of non statutorily homeless young people), which describes a sector that is now quite distinct from traditional “homeless hostels” with shared living space (Pleace and Quilgars, 2003). Much service provision of this sort offers individual rooms and/or flats and onsite staffing and support services. This form of accommodation is unlikely to be permanent, though residence can be for periods of up to two years. It would have included some services specifically designed for young homeless people, though it will have also included some general services.

**Figure 2.4: Types of service being used by non-statutorily homeless people aged under 25 during 2008/9, England. .**



Source: Client Record 2008/9

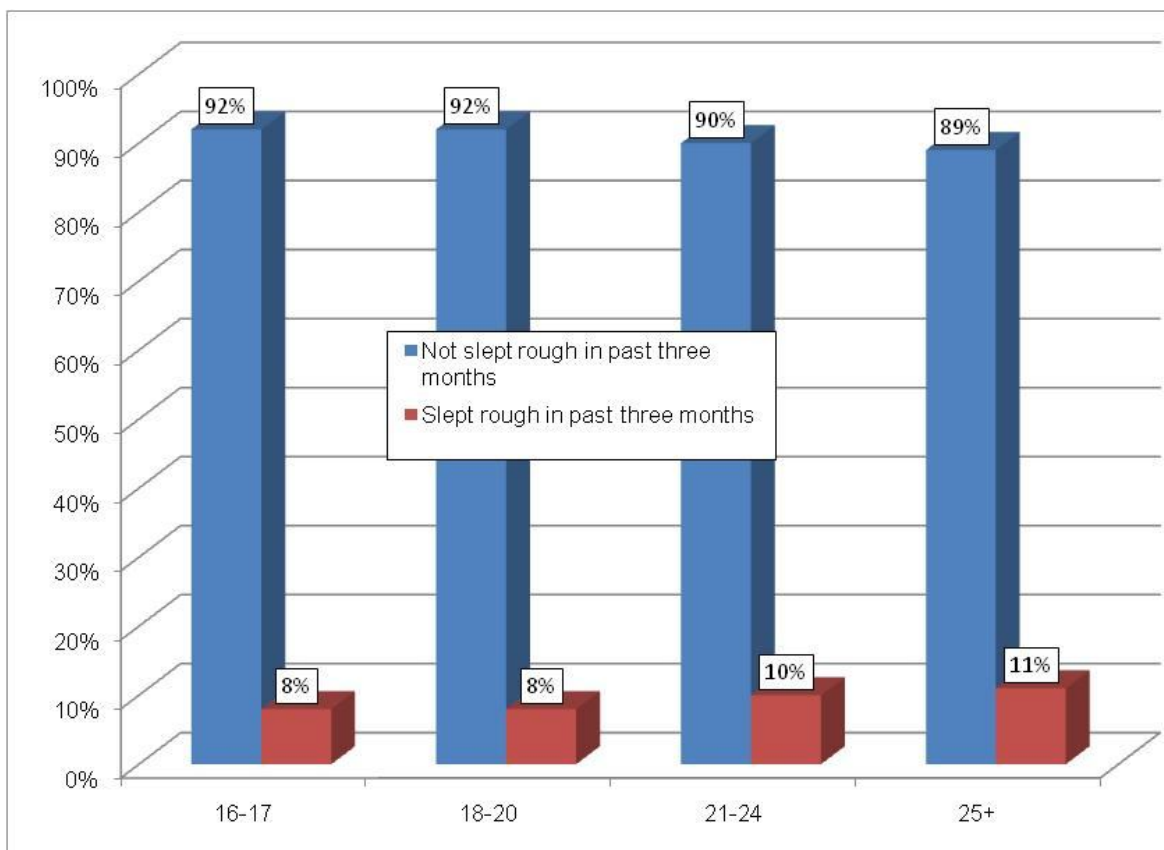
It was notable that 23% of young non-statutorily homeless people were making use of direct access accommodation, i.e. emergency housing and night shelters. Whilst some models of direct access provision are specifically for young people, others are likely to be for all age groups.

Use of floating support and resettlement services would have been by young homeless people who had access to their own tenancy, with the function of mobile workers being to ensure that they were in a position to sustain that tenancy. Outreach services will sometimes work with young homeless people when they are still sleeping rough or visit them when they are resident in temporary accommodation such as direct access shelter to help them into supported housing or resettlement services. Supported lodgings are not widely used nationally (1%).

## Young people sleeping rough

The available data on young people sleeping rough are quite restricted. In Scotland, data are collected on the rate at which people approaching local authorities for help report sleeping rough the night before in Scotland. In 2008/9, a low proportion of people seeking help from a local authority were reported as sleeping rough (5%), falling to 4% in 2009/10. Applicants are also asked to report if they slept rough in the three months prior to approaching a local authority for assistance. Over the period 2002-2007 (Figure 2.5), young people were marginally *less* likely to have slept rough in the three months prior to approaching a local authority than older households, with those aged 16-20 least likely to report sleeping rough in the past three months (8%) compared to those aged 21-24 (10%) and those aged over 25 (11%).

**Figure 2.5: Percentage of all households presenting to local authorities in Scotland from 2002-2007 that reported having slept rough in the past three months by age of head of household.**



Source: HL1 Statistics for 2002-2007 author's analysis.

Some data on households accepted as homeless in 2008/9 in Scotland suggests that young people were *less* likely to report sustained sleeping rough than other groups. During this period, only 0.7% of households headed by people aged 25 or over that were accepted as homeless reported that they were 'long term' rough sleepers. Among households headed by someone aged under 25, the rate was 0.3%<sup>12</sup>.

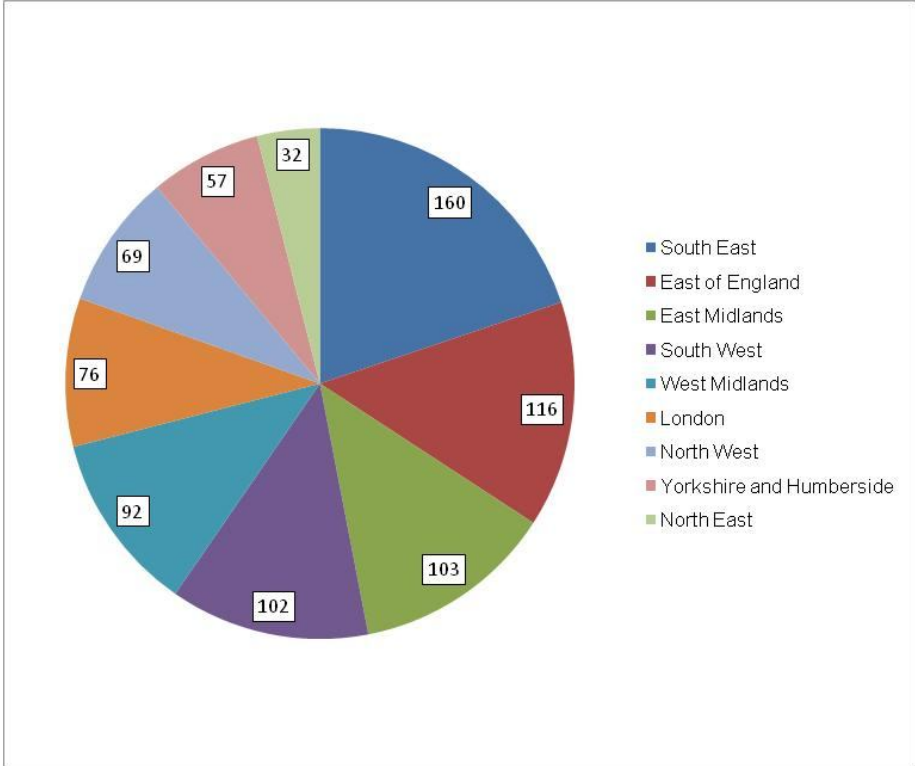
If it is assumed that around 4% of applicants were sleeping rough the night before seeking

<sup>12</sup> Source: Scottish Government HL1 statistics for 2008/9, authors' analysis.

assistance from a local authority in 2009/10 and that young people appeared in this group at a marginally lower rate, then the number of those aged 16-24 who reported sleeping rough would be around 609, based on all presentations to local authorities, or 386 of those households found statutorily homeless. Numbers in the low hundreds are consistent with wider research suggesting rough sleeping in Scotland as a whole has dropped considerably in the last 20 years (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2005).

In England, some very basic data is collected on rough sleeping in the form of street counts by local authorities, collated by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The total numbers of people sleeping rough counted and estimated in England in 2010 were 807 (Figure 2.6). However, an age break down was not available.

**Figure 2.6: Total counted and estimated numbers of people sleeping rough at any one point in England during 2010 (includes people aged over 25)**



Source: Department of Communities and Local Government.

CHAIN data, collected by services working with people sleeping rough in London, suggest that young people represent a minority of people sleeping rough in the Capital. Longitudinal research that looked at CHAIN over the period 2001/2 to 2007/8 found an average of 13% of 4,514 individuals sleeping rough for *short periods* over that period were aged under 24. In addition, it was found that among the 2,014 people reported sleeping rough for *longer periods* during 2001/2 to 2007/8, only 10% were young people (Cebulla *et al*, 2009). The most recent data from CHAIN (for 2009/10) suggested that the number of young people sleeping rough had actually fallen, with only 8% of people sleeping rough with whom services had contact being aged 25 or under<sup>13</sup>.

Looking at the figures for England as a whole (Figure 2.6), if we take the figure from

<sup>13</sup> Source: Broadway <http://www.broadwaylondon.org/CHAIN/>



London – which may or may not reflect England as a whole – then around 65 young people (8% of 807 people) were sleeping rough on any one night in England. This figure seems small, but then if we compare street counts and estimates for London, which reported 76 people sleeping rough on one night, with the CHAIN data, which reported 3,673 people sleeping rough in 2009/10, the one night count/estimate is equivalent to only 2% of the annual total. This is often referred to as the difference between the ‘stock’ (the number at any one point) and the ‘flow’ (the total number having the experience during a year). If we take the London figures as representative of England – which, as said, they may not be – then the total numbers sleeping rough across England might have been as high as some 40,350 during the course of 2009/10, of whom some 3,200 were young people.

### *The extent of annual youth homelessness*

By summarising the various sets of data discussed above, we can estimate that the number of young people experiencing homelessness in the UK in 2008/9 was at least 78-80,000. This figure includes:

- 39,000 young people estimated as being accepted as statutorily homeless in 2008/9. This compares to an estimated 43,000 in 2006/7, a fall of 10 per cent (Quilgars *et al*, 2008).
- at least 32,900 homeless young people using housing support services in 2008/9 (note that this total might include some double counting). While caveats need to be noted, these data do suggest some increase in levels since 2006/7, which reported some 31,000 homeless young people using housing support services.
- at least 4,217 non-statutorily homeless households headed by someone aged under 25 being housed by housing associations (note that this total could include young people also recorded as using housing support services). Again, while caveats need to be noted, this figure suggests that there has been some increase in levels since 2006/7, which reported 2,400 households in this group.
- an estimated 3,800 young people sleeping rough. Not all the data available to generate the 2008/9 estimate were available when our earlier 2006/7 estimate was generated (see Quilgars *et al*, 2008). However, if the same assumptions used for the 2008/9 estimate are applied to the 2006/7 data<sup>14</sup>, we can estimate that 2,400 young people slept rough in 2006/7. This suggests there may have been some increase in levels of young people sleeping rough between these two periods, but caution is needed in interpreting the scale of that increase because the data sources are incomplete. (It should also be noted that young people sleeping rough might *also* appear in the statistics on housing support, statutory homelessness and lets made to non statutorily homeless young people by social landlords).

If this new rough sleeping calculation is included in the 2006/7 estimate, this would increase to a total of 78,800 young people experiencing homelessness, approximately 1,000 young people less than the 2008/9 estimate of 79,900. The difference between these two estimates is well within the margins of error in such broad estimates, and so the safest assumption is that the overall scale of youth homelessness has stayed steady between these two periods. Another way of putting this is that, in both 2006/7 and 2008/9, approximately one out of

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<sup>14</sup> Using a combination of HL1, CHAIN and street count data from 2007, and applying the same assumptions as were used for the 2008/9 estimate.

every 100 young people in the UK aged 16–24 experienced some form of homelessness over the course of the year.

However, as already noted, this estimate can only be broadly representative of the extent of youth homelessness in the UK. There are a number of limitations in the data sets used for the estimate. Table 2.5 shows the gaps in data availability in a number of areas. Not only does it not provide estimates on non-statutory homelessness and rough sleeping in Wales and Northern Ireland, but it only reports partial data on non-statutory homelessness and rough sleeping in Scotland and England. While the data on statutorily homeless households are better, outside Scotland there is only partial demographic information on the young people going through the statutory system.

**Table 2.5: Estimate of total youth homelessness in 2008/9**

Source: Reported and Grossed P1E Statistics (England), HL1 statistics (Scotland), WHO-12 statistics (Wales), Northern Ireland

Type of homelessness	England*	Scotland	Wales*	Northern Ireland*	United Kingdom
Statutorily homeless	21,270	12,601	2,698	2,450	39,019
Non statutorily homeless households by social landlords	3,472	745	No data	No data	4,217
Non statutorily homeless using housing support services	32,900	No data	No data	No data	32,900
Young people sleeping rough	3,200	600	No data	No data	3,800
Total	60,842	13,946	2,698	2,450	79,936

Housing Executive. England, Scotland and Wales place 16-17 year-olds in priority need or preference groups on the basis of their age, whereas Northern Ireland does not. **Partly estimated** due to some data not being available at the time of writing.

The estimate is also likely to be an underrepresentation of the numbers of young people experiencing homelessness in one year on a number of accounts. It is clear that many situations of homelessness, insecure and inadequate housing in the ETHOS categorisation (Table 2.1) are not included. In addition, the figures on homelessness presentations for Northern Ireland and Scotland illustrate that the numbers of young people facing housing problems is likely to be much larger than those accepted under the legislation. The numbers of young people experiencing non-statutorily homelessness are undoubtedly larger, though it is not possible to say how much larger because some data are not collected, particularly those who are staying in informal situations and do not approach any ‘homelessness services’.

There is also a risk of some overestimation due to issues of double counting across the data-sets. For example, some young people experiencing rough sleeping will then be accepted as statutorily homeless in the same year. On definitional issues, it should be highlighted that some young people utilising Supporting People services were receiving floating support in their own tenancies, and were not homeless at the point of measurement – although they were receiving services as a formerly or potentially at risk homeless household. Further, this estimate presumes that all the young people in medium stay supported accommodation such as foyers are homeless, a point debated in Chapter Four.

In respect of young people sleeping rough, the situation is largely guesswork when it comes to understanding their true numbers and characteristics, as street counts are inherently inaccurate and there is only CHAIN and the data collected on prevalence of rough sleeping collected by councils in Scotland.

The annual estimate of the numbers of young people experiencing youth homelessness must therefore be treated with considerable caution. Better data collection is needed in this area to improve our understanding of the scale of youth homelessness.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the challenges involved in both defining and measuring youth homelessness. In terms of definition, it would be important for any policy on ending youth homelessness to both define the age range of young people under consideration, and the types of homelessness that are being tackled (elements of rooflessness, houselessness, insecurity and/or inadequate housing). There is a clear need for better data collection on youth homelessness in order to better measure the scale of the issues, and also track changes over time. Nonetheless, the best estimate available would suggest that youth homelessness remains a significant problem across the UK and one that, overall, has not reduced over the last few years despite improvements in prevention activities in England.

### 3 Examining the concept of ending homelessness

This chapter reviews existing debates on the concept of ‘ending’ homelessness. It begins by providing an overview of relevant policy statements from organisations at both the national and international level, before moving on to examine the key recurring themes emerging from these debates on ending homelessness and their implications for any aim to end youth homelessness in the UK.

#### Existing statements on ending homelessness

As outlined in Chapter 1, Centrepoint’s vision is to ‘end’ youth homelessness. Ending homelessness – or particular aspects of homelessness - is also increasingly being adopted as an explicit aim by other leading charitable organisations in the UK (such as Crisis and Homeless Link) and by government and other statutory bodies. In 2008, the previous Labour Government announced a target to end rough sleeping in England by 2012 (Communities and Local Government, 2008) and, after some initial ambivalence<sup>15</sup>, the 2010 Coalition Government affirmed its commitment to this national target<sup>16</sup>. The Mayor of London has also made a specific commitment to end rough sleeping in London by 2012 (Mayor of London, 2009), and has set up a strategic partnership – the London Delivery Board (LDB) - tasked with delivering on this commitment.

This emphasis on ending homelessness is not confined to the UK. A focus on ending homelessness has emerged quite strongly across Europe in the last few years. In 2008 the European Parliament adopted a Written Declaration on ‘ending street homelessness’ in Europe by 2015, and in 2010 the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) launched a campaign called ‘Ending Homelessness’. FEANTSA say that “*the central message of this campaign is that homelessness can and should be ended*”<sup>17</sup>, and in order to achieve this aim, integrated homelessness strategies should be developed which address the following five goals:

- No one sleeping rough
- No one living in emergency accommodation for longer than is an ‘emergency’
- No one living in transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on
- No one leaving an institution without housing options
- No young people becoming homeless as a result of the transition to independent living

Following the FEANTSA work, the Jury of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (2011) was recently asked to consider whether ‘ending homelessness’ was a realistic objective<sup>18</sup>. The Jury concluded that ending homelessness could and should be

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/care-and-support/government-shies-away-from-2012-rough-sleeping-pledge/6511792.article>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/speeches/corporate/roughsleepingconference2010>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=1252>

<sup>18</sup> The Jury was asked to consider six questions on homelessness, the other five being: what does homelessness mean?; are ‘housing-led’ policy approaches the most effective method of preventing and tackling homelessness?; how can meaningful participation of homeless people be assured?; to what extent should people be able to access homeless services irrespective of legal status and citizenship?; and; what should be the elements of an EU strategy

ended by national governments, supported by an EU-wide homelessness strategy. They acknowledged that there would always be a flow of people into homelessness but that prevention and intervention measures could both prevent homelessness and ensure that long-term solutions are secured quickly for those who face a homelessness situation. In this context, the Jury argued that ending homelessness would ‘require ongoing homelessness policies’ (p.11), which suggested that their definition of ‘ending homelessness’ was one of minimising homelessness as far as possible.

Individual countries in Europe, besides the UK, are also adopting targets to end homelessness. Perhaps the leading example is Finland, which has implemented homeless strategies since 1987 and has achieved well-documented progress (FEANTSA, 2010). In 2008 the Finnish Government decided to implement a national programme to reduce long-term homelessness for 2008-2011. The objective of the programme is to halve long-term homelessness by 2011, and to end it completely by 2015. This new strategy is a response to the sense that previous strategies had failed to reach those with multiple needs beyond housing (Kaakinen, 2010). Possibly the other European country of greatest interest in terms of current attempts to ‘end’ homelessness is Ireland. Ireland has established a strategy for the period 2008 – 2013 called ‘The Way Home’ – which identifies six aims, including the elimination of the need to sleep rough and the elimination of long-term homelessness (Gavin, 2010). These efforts are centred on Dublin, where most homeless people in Ireland live. In Denmark, the government has also recently set a target of ending street homelessness by 2014.

In the US, the major national homelessness pressure group is called the ‘The National Alliance to End Homelessness’, and there has for some time been a federal priority, implemented via the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), to ‘end chronic homelessness’ in the US (Culhane & Byrne, 2010). The US’s recent federal homelessness strategy expands this commitment to include ending homelessness amongst veterans over the next five years, and to end homelessness amongst families, children and young people over the next 10 years (USICH, 2010). The USICH has asked major US cities to come up with a 10 year plan to end homelessness in their community, and many have done so. The notion of adopting 10 year plans to end homelessness has also been adopted in some major cities in Canada, such as Calgary in Alberta<sup>19</sup>. Thus the language of ‘ending’ homelessness is very well established in the US and elsewhere in North America.

### **The key themes underpinning this focus on ending homelessness**

But what does all this emphasis on ‘ending’ homelessness actually mean in practice, and how does it differ from previous efforts to address, tackle and minimise the problem? To some extent this discourse about ending homelessness can be viewed as a (not unhelpful) way of dramatising existing priorities and dimensions of good practice, and as straightforward profile-raising. But once one digs beneath the rhetoric, five themes do emerge which suggest that ‘ending homelessness’ represents, or at least can represent, not just a powerful slogan, but also a qualitative shift in perspective. Each of these five themes or characteristics is addressed in turn.

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on homelessness?

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/>

### 1. 'Ending' rather than 'managing' homelessness

First, attempts to 'end' homelessness are often articulated in contradistinction to previous efforts aimed at simply 'managing' the problem. They are therefore portrayed as more ambitious and radical than what has gone before. For example, Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness is described as:

*"...a bold and innovative plan designed to shift our focus from managing or coping with homelessness, to a community-wide effort to end it."*<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, FEANTSA (2010) are explicit about this shift in emphasis:

*"... responses [to homelessness] have been [often been] reactive and somewhat ad-hoc. They have sought to manage the problem rather than to resolve or end it. Thus, constellations of services have developed to cater for the immediate needs of homeless people... These responses to the immediate problem of homelessness are undoubtedly effective in treating its severest symptoms and have an important role to play as short-term solutions. However, several decades after homelessness emerged as a large-scale problem in the EU, it is time to stop managing the problem and to strive to end homelessness."* (p.2)

This perspective was repeated by the Jury of the European Consensus Conference (2011, p11), stating that a 'paradigm shift' was required away from the traditional policies of 'managing' homelessness.

At its most contentious, this emphasis on ending rather than managing homelessness can be seen as a reaction against the 'homelessness industry', such as providers of night shelters and hostels, which may be considered to have a vested interest in seeking to keep people homeless in order to maintain their 'market'. FEANTSA is fairly diplomatic on this point but does remark that:

*"In some cases, responses to homelessness have in fact become part of the problem. For example, hostels that were originally designed as temporary accommodation have become places where people stay long-term, serving to entrench homelessness. Hostels can fill up with longer-term service users and cease to fulfil their original function as temporary accommodation, meaning that more such accommodation has to be provided..."* (FEANTSA, 2010, p.2).

This sort of criticism can also be found in blunter terms in O'Sullivan's (forthcoming) critique of those organisations in Ireland which resisted a fundamental reconfiguration in service provision associated with the target to eliminate long-term homelessness:

*"Ending long-term homelessness demands a shift in service provision from temporary services to services addressing the causes of people becoming homeless and the need to sustain tenancies."*

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/>

While the Irish strategy has been based on a social partnership model, with a strong emphasis on broad-based consensus, there was resistance to this service reconfiguration in some quarters:

*“Dissenting voices, of course, were also evident during this process, but by and large these voices pathologised the homeless and advocated the maintenance and extension of dependent services rather than services which would facilitate such households exiting homelessness.” (O’Sullivan, forthcoming)*

Other European countries – such as Denmark and Finland – have also noted resistance on the part of some NGOs and the press to service reconfiguration associated with policy shifts towards ending homelessness, particularly when these are associated with a move towards Housing First approaches (see below).

## *2. A shift towards ‘Housing First’ models*

Second, the emphasis on ‘ending’ rather than ‘managing’ homelessness is very often associated with a shift towards ‘Housing First’ approaches in North America and, increasingly, in Europe. FEANTSA (2010), for example, lays emphasis on Housing First approaches in ending homelessness:

*“Phasing out shelters and replacing them with permanent housing units which facilitate independent, supported or supervised living is an innovative approach to ending long-term shelter use. It is based on the ‘Housing First’ approach. Rather than moving homeless individuals through stages, whereby each stage is a move closer to stable housing (for example, rough sleeping to shelter, to transitional housing programme, to apartment), ‘housing first’ means people moving directly from rough sleeping or shelter use to permanent, independent housing.” (p.9)*

FEANTSA also use the Finnish national strategy as a key example of a Housing First-led approach to ending homelessness, and Kaakinen (2010, p. 2-3) confirms this:

*“The [Finnish] programme is founded on a clear philosophy and vision of the elimination of homelessness, the ‘housing first’ principle... The basic idea behind the ‘housing first’ concept as developed in Finland is a housing package where accommodation and services can be organised according to the resident’s needs, abilities and social welfare and health requirements. A person is allocated independent accommodation with a tenancy agreement – a ‘home’ – and services that differ in their intensity according to the individual are established around this. Services are implemented via partnership working between the accommodation provider and public social and health services.”*

While what precisely is meant by ‘Housing First’ varies widely, there is no doubting the shift in philosophy across much of the developed world from ‘transitional’ or ‘staircase’ models of provision for single homeless people, including those with the most complex needs, towards immediate permanent solutions, either in mainstream housing or in ‘permanent supportive housing’. Housing First approaches are being pursued either at national level or in local strategies in countries as diverse with respect to both welfare and housing systems as Canada, Finland, Ireland, Denmark, and Portugal, as well as in the US where the original

'Pathways' model emerged (Johnsen & Teixeira, 2010). Yet in the UK, aside from isolated pockets of interest, Housing First seems to meet with a certain amount of resistance or indifference, which is interesting in itself.

One question which has seldom been explicitly addressed is the appropriateness of Housing First-type approaches in attempts to end homelessness amongst young people, as most of the relevant service provision and research has focused on over 25s, particularly those with complex needs. One could take the view that, as youth is a transitional and mobile stage in most people's lives, transitional or linear models remain important for this group, and an emphasis on immediate access to independent, permanent housing is not as relevant as it is with older homeless people. This may then impact on the types of accommodation one would view as constituting 'homeless accommodation' for young people, possibly implying a distinction between older and younger people with respect to definitions of homelessness (see also Chapter 2).

### *3. A focus on the most extreme manifestations*

As is clear from above, strategies to 'end' homelessness generally prioritise its more extreme manifestations, such as rough sleeping (England/London, Ireland, Denmark, FEANTSA, European Parliament) and/or long-term or chronic homelessness (US, Finland, Ireland). Youth homelessness is sometimes mentioned in these commitments to end homelessness, but is rarely the top or first priority. For example, the new US Federal Strategy sets a target on ending homelessness amongst young people, but over a longer time frame (10 years) than for chronic or veteran homelessness (5 years), and mentions it only alongside family and child homelessness. As noted above, the FEANTSA campaign to end homelessness has as its fifth and final goal that 'no young person should become homeless as a result of the transition to independent living'. The FEANTSA handbook for policy makers on ending homelessness elaborates on this goal:

*"The transition to independent living is a time when people are vulnerable to becoming homeless. No young person should be made homeless because of a lack of first-time housing options, services or entitlement to benefits during the transition to independent living. More can be done to help young people to live independently and access suitable housing options and there are a variety of examples of how this can be achieved."* (FEANTSA, 2010, p.14)

This all begs the question of whether, in general, youth homelessness has a high enough priority in these emerging national and international programmes on 'ending' rather than merely 'managing' homelessness. It may also prompt consideration of whether targets to end youth homelessness should, like more general campaigns to end homelessness, focus on its most extreme manifestations, especially rough sleeping.

### *4. An association with assertive, interventionist and/or enforcement approaches*

In the UK, and possibly elsewhere, programmes to end homelessness may be associated with a very 'assertive' approach whereby homeless people's 'achieved welfare' is prioritised over their choices, self-determination and autonomy (Fitzpatrick & Johnsen, 2009). This is particularly so with respect to ending entrenched or chronic rough sleeping, where there may be a sense that the 'liberal' approach has failed many of the most vulnerable who are not in a



position to make good choices, and this keeps them on the street or in other homeless contexts.

Such a strongly interventionist and conditional approach can be seen in the Hostel Capital Improvement Programme, which required frontline services receiving government funding, such as hostels and day centres, to become *'places of change'* rather than environments that work with homeless people *'at their own pace'* (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2009). A higher level of 'social control' again relates to enforcement interventions which use civil or criminal legal powers to change homeless people's behaviour, in particular to stop them sleeping rough or engaging in other aspects of street culture, such as begging. Homeless Link make this explicit connection between measures to end street homelessness and "enforcement" action on their website:

*"Local areas are increasingly taking a more assertive approach in their outreach work with rough sleepers... Often this means giving a clear message that sleeping rough is not acceptable and setting out the clear range of options available to rough sleepers. It is underpinned by the belief that rough sleeping is inherently harmful to the person sleeping rough... ..In essence, this is about 'making rough sleeping uncomfortable', decreasing the desirability of sleeping on the street, or actively making it more difficult to sleep in certain areas, as well as addressing associated street issues. Simultaneously, this is often designed to reinforce and encourage take-up of the offers of support available... Policy and practice around enforcement can be controversial. It leads to questions of whether people have the right to sleep on the street if they choose to and are not harming others; whether sleeping rough is a legitimate choice; and whether there are real alternatives for everyone in every area. However, assertive outreach and enforcement measures, used proportionately and lawfully, can be effective if provided alongside a personalised, appropriate and multi-agency pathway of support<sup>21</sup>."*

This whole area poses an acute ethical dilemma for many service providers who feel that, as a matter of principle, it is inappropriate to exercise this degree of 'social control' over homeless people, with accusations of paternalism always close at hand. On the other hand, others working in the sector are sympathetic to this interventionist stance because they feel that previous 'liberal' approaches based on 'unconditional acceptance' have simply not worked for the most vulnerable homeless people (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2009; Johnsen with Fitzpatrick, 2009).

This trade-off between 'choice' and 'ending' homelessness may therefore be difficult to avoid with some of the most vulnerable homeless people, though it may be less of an issue with young homeless people who are less likely to be entrenched in a homelessness 'culture'. That said, many local services report that young people who 'refuse to engage' provide some of the greatest challenges in resolving homelessness, so there may well exist an issue about just how 'assertive' youth homelessness services should be and the extent to which they should attempt to 'impose' themselves on reluctant young people.

##### *5. Always a circumscribed goal*

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.homeless.org.uk/assertive-outreach-and-enforcement>

Fifth, and finally, there are always caveats and limitations to the commitment to ‘end’ homelessness. These tend to take three forms.

The first is to make an allowance for what could be termed ‘frictional’ homelessness. This is in recognition of the fact that the sort of crisis situations that lead to homelessness will continue to occur, and many key triggers - such as relationship breakdown - are never going to be entirely preventable. The key thing here is to minimise the length of time spent homeless to an absolute minimum and ensure rapid and appropriate move-on. This perspective can be seen, for example, in the FEANTSA ending homelessness goals number 2 (no one living in emergency accommodation for longer than is an ‘emergency’) and number 3 (no one living in transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on). There is also widespread recognition that very short-term homelessness may inevitably occur before services have had an opportunity to intervene. This is exemplified in the ‘no second night out’ definition of ending rough sleeping adopted by the London Delivery Board:

*“By the end of 2012 no one will live on the streets of London and no individual arriving on the streets will sleep out for a second night.”*<sup>22</sup>

The second limitation, or nuance, in many programmes to end homelessness is that they often involve a re-designation of existing homeless accommodation as permanent accommodation so that those living in it are no longer ‘homeless’. The classic example here is Finland which has embarked on a programme of transforming its shelters into long-term supported housing units, wherein residents have tenancies and are not expected to stay for a fixed term before moving on (FEANTSA, 2010). In Ireland likewise, much existing homeless or temporary accommodation is being converted into either permanent tenancies or permanent supportive housing. Given that in at least some cases people will continue to live in exactly the same places – possibly with same physical standards and similar levels of support - one could argue that this re-designation as ‘not homeless’ is mere semantics. But equally, if one views insecure tenure as central to the definition of homelessness, then this conceptual shift may be viewed as perfectly legitimate.

Third, there is sometimes a sense (at least anecdotally) that a commitment to ‘end’ homelessness may be adopted because it is helpful in maintaining momentum and protecting resources, even if no-one actually believes that it is achievable. There is evidence of this view in Jones & Pleace’s (2010) recent review of single homelessness in the UK, whereby respondents acknowledged the success of the various rough sleepers strategies, but there was a broad consensus that the problem would never be wholly eradicated.

*I don’t think that by 2012 no-one will ever sleep rough again...that is absurd. I think the real test is, you know, by 2012 whether people have to sleep rough for a long time...the goal really is making sure that the systems we have in place are there to get people off the streets and moving them on successfully in a way that doesn’t scar and damage them permanently. (Stakeholder, statutory sector, quoted in Jones & Pleace, 2010, p.40).*

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<sup>22</sup> [http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/July2010\\_0.pdf](http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/July2010_0.pdf)

## Conclusion

What does this all mean for ‘ending youth homelessness’? This conceptual review foregrounds a number of key questions that will be considered in the remainder of the report:

- What would a shift from ‘managing’ to ‘ending’ youth homelessness look like, and in particular what role (if any) would there be for transitional forms of accommodation and linear/staircase models?
- Linked with this, how relevant is a Housing First approach to eliminating youth homelessness? Does the fact that this is generally a transitional stage in life mean that immediate access to permanent accommodation is less of a priority than for older homeless people?
- If a highly interventionist approach is necessary to end homelessness amongst some groups, is the implied restriction on choice justified by the focus on improved welfare? Or is this focus on highly assertive, or even enforcement, approaches less relevant to young people because they are seldom as ‘entrenched’ in homelessness than some older homeless people?
- Aside from the necessary changes and interventions on the part of state and third sector organisations, what is the role of parents in ending youth homelessness, especially with respect to 16 and 17 year olds and young people still in education?
- To what degree can a commitment to end youth homelessness be legitimately circumscribed, for example, to make allowance for frictional, short term homelessness before agencies have had a chance to intervene?
- Might a commitment to end youth homelessness – or certain aspects of youth homelessness - be helpful even if it is not realistic?

One final point to note with respect to this existing conceptual debate on ending homelessness is that, though *‘prevention... has often been hailed as a necessary component of any strategy to end homelessness’* (Culhane et al, 2011, p.295), most of the discussion above, at least by implication, focuses on mechanisms whereby exits from homelessness can be made more rapid and sustainable. In other words, they tend to be about *ending homelessness at the individual level* rather than *ending homelessness as a social phenomenon*. In order to achieve the latter, we must also stop people becoming homeless in the first place, and this emphasis on prevention and early intervention is, if anything, even more relevant with respect to young people than it is with other groups vulnerable to homelessness.

## 4 What would ending youth homelessness look like?

This chapter draws on the primary fieldwork undertaken for the project to consider the extent to which the concept of ‘ending youth homelessness’ might be a realistic and/or useful aim to adopt in the UK. The chapter also considers what ‘ending youth homelessness’ might actually mean in practice on the ground, and whether this would mean different or similar approaches for different groups of young people through an analysis of a series of vignettes. The chapter presents the views of national key players, alongside the perspectives of service providers in three local authorities in England (see Chapter 1 for details).

### The concept of ending youth homelessness

#### *A realistic aim?*

A few commentators stated that it would be possible to end youth homelessness but that this would require a scale of investment that was unlikely to occur, particularly in the present context. However, the over-riding view was that an aim to end youth homelessness was necessarily aspirational, as the triggers for homelessness were so various and heavily influenced by the nature of family relationships. It was thought unlikely that any network of services could meet the needs of everyone who might face a breakdown in their home circumstances. Further some commentators explained that much broader processes underpinned youth homelessness and these would need to be addressed to end youth homelessness.

*I think it is essentially aspirational because there will always be some young people, no matter how tenacious systems are, [who] at certain times in their lives won't be able to access or maintain access with services... People's lives are just too complicated if that makes sense, but I do think you can go a long, long way down that road and much further than we have got to... (National key player)*

*There is nothing that is going to stop people going into hostels. I don't think there is anything to stop people from being homeless either, 'cos if your mum or your dad want to kick you out they are going to kick you out.... There is no way of stopping it , really and truly... (Young person)*

*There is a whole lot of societal stuff that needs to be addressed if we are to stop homelessness and which is about a fairer and more equitable society, basically. (Service provider)*

*Poverty is the bottom line.... Poorer families are more likely to exclude their children at an earlier age, and they are more likely to have poorer outcomes... So maybe to end youth homelessness we need to end poverty...That's a really realistic goal in this environment! (Service provider)*

However, as the above quote suggests, many commentators felt that it was possible for the UK to move much closer to eradicating youth homelessness, in a similar vein to the successes achieved in reducing levels of rough sleeping. A few commentators explained that it was necessary to break down the aim to end youth homelessness into smaller objectives. There was some support for the principle behind the ‘no second night’ sleeping rough target

in London. There was also a reasonable level of agreement that it should be possible to limit the amount of time that people would spend in a crisis situation and ensure that they do not experience longer term homelessness which is known to be detrimental to people's longer-term well-being.

*...It's one of those where the objectives are more important than the aims. How do we get to that aim? And those objectives will be more important than having that as an aim, as that's not an aim that can ever really be met, because someone is always going to be homeless. You get thrown out today and you will be homeless until you are housed. Even if you are housed in a day, you've still been homeless for a day. (Service provider)*

*I'm not convinced it works as an objective. I mean, I think if you try and segment homelessness down, and youth homelessness within that. Then I think there are aspects of it that you can stop, and things that you can do to mitigate and prevent, but I'm fairly wary of banner headlines like ending youth homelessness. Ending street homelessness and within that ending young people being on the streets, for example, could be a reasonable objective.... (National key player)*

*There would always be elements of homelessness, but the ending of it is about having processes in place so that homelessness isn't a permanent state for any one individual.... (National key player)*

It was also pointed out that the closer one became to eradicating homelessness, the more likely that one had to use assertive methods to ensure that people did not end up homeless; and that resources would probably need to rise disproportionately to achieve near zero youth homelessness.

*Is there a point where you start to get diminishing returns, so you can decrease things massively along the way and then there becomes a point where you are trying to saturate it but you are still not getting to zero? (National key player)*

However, although it might not be possible to avoid every young person facing a crisis situation, there was a strong call to push forward with an agenda that would minimise the numbers of young people facing homelessness. Essentially this meant having a range of high quality housing options available for young people, wide enough to meet the diverse needs of young people and ensure that young people did not fall between the gaps of services. It was seen as very important that any housing moves should be planned and that placements should be sustainable. Sustainability was seen as more important than security of tenure per se. This was a reflection of the age of young people and their greater mobility compared to adults, as well as reflections on the possible role of transitional accommodation models (see later).

*I think one of the key things there needs to be for ending youth homelessness is for there to be realistic accommodation to independence, because I think a lot of families boil over because they can't see a way for young people to move themselves, to afford to move out within a realistic timescale... (National key player)*

*The mechanisms in place to ensure that any young person who becomes homeless is*

*able to access services to support them into independent living, maybe that starts with some high support accommodation but there should always be a pathway leading to independent living, gradually reducing the dependency on state and services so they can become self-supported. (National key player)*

One commentator also suggested that experiencing a very short period of 'homelessness' may not be as traumatic an experience if it was extremely temporary in nature. Within the context of being able to access suitable accommodation quickly it would be a risk alongside many other risks encountered by young people as part of a relatively normal growing up process. For example, a couple of nights spent in a hostel whilst finding a flat, or staying with a friend for a week after a row at home, might be manageable for young people.

There were very different views on the usefulness of targets for any aim to end youth homelessness. A few national players supported this quite passionately as the only way to progress such an aim; others, more likely to be service providers at the local authority level, felt that targets could be very counter-productive. It was also suggested that having a target date was not helpful given that it was not possible to meet it (referencing recent experience with the child poverty target).

*I think it's good to have an aim. It's when those aims are used as sticks to beat you with, it becomes, do you know, and that's when, for me, it becomes really problematic.... (Service provider)*

*... There is a down side to targets, but on the other hand the power of targets in focusing minds and uniting people behind something, if they are well led and driven, I think there is a real power in that. And actually you have to count it and measure how things change in order to know whether people are making progress and how far you've got left to go. So I think there probably is value in the timescale. (National key player)*

*I would say that it would be a reasonable campaign to say, should it not be the case that all local authorities have a strategic responsibility to make sure that there are no young people out on the streets at night, in danger. I wouldn't then try and define that in statute of what we mean by a rough sleeper, what we mean by a young person. I'd be very open about that side of things. I would say, can we all agree that it is just not sensible for a young person under the age of 18 to be out on the streets at 2 in the morning? And we will let you think about what is the best way to make sure that is not happening and have the services available if it does happen.... (National key player)*

*A useful aim?*

With the exception of some service providers (see below), generally respondents agreed that there were good reasons for attempting to end youth homelessness. A number of commentators felt very strongly that there was a moral duty to pursue such an aim in a wealthy society such as the UK.

*You have got to aspire to it. It's the same as ending child poverty. (Service provider)*

*I think there are lots of very strong and convincing voices in the sector that would say that we have grown accustomed or become tolerant with some fundamental problems*

*with the housing market, and homelessness is one of them. And what we actually need is that kind of stretching vision and aspiration that this is no longer good enough. We simply shouldn't be accepting homelessness at the level or prevalence that we have seen it and we, quite frankly, as a society should have got to grips with this by now. (National key player)*

*It is enshrined in law that the welfare of children should come first and foremost... So from the legal perspective it is government's responsibility to address these issues; and also from a moral side as well... They shouldn't be written off at this early stage, so I do think it is right to eliminate youth homelessness... (National key player)*

Most commentators saw the adoption of the aim of ending youth homelessness as falling to national governments and local authorities, as it was felt that they were the only ones that could allocate the necessary resources to progress the aim, although competing demands for resources would always make this difficult.

*I think it's interesting in terms of who it is appropriate for, to have that as an aim. Realistically an organisation like [names of charities], unless they manage to get an extraordinary reach of service nationwide, or in partnerships, it's never going to be in their gift to do it, or within their powers to do it in terms of legal powers or anything else to be able to pull people together to do it. So I think that does put a bit of responsibility really onto central government to drive any such aim. (National key player)*

In one case study there was a strong consensus that there might be a risk in adopting an aim to end youth homelessness as the concept might then be defined very narrowly. Respondents thought it could in fact be actively 'harmful' rhetoric that would lead to renaming and possibly 'disguising' youth homelessness. In another, a few people were worried about adopting a too ambitious aim of 'ending' homelessness, but agreed that there was a need to work hard towards minimising it and a goal helped galvanise this.

A few commentators, whilst broadly in support of the aim to end youth homelessness, suggested that the aim needed to be broadened out to encompass a more positive focus which attempted to provide all young people with suitable and sustainable accommodation. Within youth homelessness services generally, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of services moving beyond a 'deficit' model, focussed on the problems faced by young people, towards a model that seeks to support young people to achieve their potential. This emphasis has always been present to some extent in the sector, but there appears to be a shift towards making this more explicit. A leading example of this approach is the Foyer Federation's 'Open Talent' campaign which attempts to transform services to develop young people's potential so they move from 'coping' with problems to 'thriving' in society:

*"A vision to thrive is a very different one than a vision to ending poverty, eradicating homelessness, moving young people out of dependency, or any number of worthy campaigns. It is focused only on the positive, on the progression rather than the prevention." (Foyer Federation, 2010, p.9)*

## **What would ending youth homelessness mean in practice?**

This second section of the chapter identifies the range of provision required to move towards, if not totally achieve, the eradication of youth homelessness.

### *Prevention and early intervention*

The importance of adequate attention to early prevention and preventative initiatives, even if not the precise mechanisms, is accepted as essential to any strategy to address youth homelessness (Quilgars *et al*, 2008). Commentators felt that considerable progress had been made in recent years in developing these responses, but that there was still more that could be done to further these agendas. Existing practice differed even across the three case studies. One local authority felt that their prevention work had been particularly successful, with for example 78% of 16 and 17 year olds (August to October 2010) returning to the parental home following presenting at the local authority and being assessed as homeless. Representatives in a second authority felt that, despite a number of preventative initiatives, that their response was still predominately a ‘crisis’ response, intervening when people were imminently leaving the parental home or a tenancy. Educational initiatives in schools on homelessness were seen as useful but only as one part of the issue. Effective prevention meant working much more proactively with parents (see below) as well as addressing the wider causes of youth homelessness, including poverty, educational exclusion, low levels of aspiration in communities and so on.

### *Access to advice and information*

*I do think that whole issue of where do young people go to get help is a really big part of the challenge... that we maybe haven't made enough of, in terms of tackling homelessness.* (National key player)

A couple of key players identified a gap in the present network of services around appropriate advice and information for young people. Previous research has shown that young people often pursue many different avenues to try and solve their accommodation problems before arriving at a local authority (Pleace *et al*, 2008). It was felt that the local authority was not necessarily easy to approach and a better model might be a one-stop shop for young people which could be approached for a range of advice associated with the transition from the parental/care home to independent life. One possible model quoted was the Youth Information Advice Counselling and Support services (YIACS) (Youth Access, 2010). It was recognised that statutory authorities were also caught in a Catch 22 situation when offering housing advice, wishing to provide high quality information but also not ‘opening the flood-gates’ that might encourage young people to move out of the parental home when housing options are limited.

### *Emergency accommodation*

As identified above, a number of respondents were sceptical about the likelihood of completely ending youth homelessness and stressed that it would remain crucial for any service network to provide appropriate emergency accommodation for young people. It was also crucial that people could move on quickly from this emergency accommodation. An



example of this type of provision existed in Case Study 2 which had recently commissioned an 18 bed emergency scheme (up to 56 days stay) for young people aged 16 to 21.

Considerable concern was expressed by some people about the ongoing inappropriate use of bed and breakfast accommodation for young homeless people. A particular issue was highlighted that social services were sometimes still relying on this type of provision for care leavers – and also now for those assessed under the Southwark judgement (Twinch, 2011b). There was concern that this use was not being adequately monitored.

Linked with the need for emergency accommodation, but with a more preventative focus, a particularly clear recommendation arising from the empirical work was the need for ‘respite’ accommodation to be made available to young people and their families. Such provision could potentially offer everyone ‘a breather’ when tensions were beginning to run high in households and time for any problems to be negotiated. This idea was raised unprompted in two of the case studies as well as by a number of the national key players.

*We don't have break-out places, or half-way houses, or like crash-beds, respite, because sometimes a young person just needs to out of the family home, everyone needs to take a bit of a breath-out, and they can start again, not to say that it's a permanent move but a chill out... (Service provider)*

*If a family can plan for an absence, they can better sustain the presence...There are models with other groups where respite is expected, and it is built in deliberately to sustain the family or carer – but not with this group... (National key player)*

The existing ‘Time Out’ model operated by St Basils was highlighted as an example. The initiative can offer 16 and 17 year olds two weeks in a supported housing scheme, during which time they do intensive work with the family and the young person. Currently funded by homelessness grant, monitoring had recorded that 78% of young people utilising the provision returned to the parental home.

*Supported accommodation for homeless youth or a youth accommodation sector?*

Most commentators agreed that a range of housing and support options were required in any one area if the housing needs of young people were to be met and youth homelessness prevented. Generally, there was strong agreement that this should include at least some forms of specialist supported accommodation schemes. It was felt that although young people’s needs would differ from person to person, many (particularly those aged 16 and 17) would require a supported environment. Experience suggested that many young people did not possess all the skills required to live independently at such a young age and, for some, receiving visiting support in a tenancy was not enough to support them. Some commentators leaned more to supporting transitional accommodation of this sort for young people, whilst others leaned more to helping people access their own tenancies, but all agreed that some supported accommodation was required. In this way, commentators did not appear to support a primarily Housing First or housing-led approach to accommodation provision for younger people. Most research participants tended to focus on the need for transitional accommodation for the younger age group, particularly for 16 and 17 year olds and also for some young people up to 21.

Commentators highlighted problems of ‘bed-blocking’ in existing provision of this nature, whereby young people were having to stay longer than they needed in hostels or supported accommodation due to the lack of move-on provision. There was therefore a tension in debates between ensuring that young people could access supported accommodation models but that they only utilised this provision whilst they needed the support offered by it.

There was also a considerable amount of support for the idea of re-conceptualising the role of supported accommodation models to offer a more positive opportunity to live in transitional accommodation, much like students are usually offered opportunities to live in halls of residence for part of their university experience. It was pointed out that some supported accommodation models already offered this form of experience, for example via foyers, where young people can utilise high quality accommodation whilst they are in education, training or working. However, it was felt that there needed to be a shift away from viewing this provision primarily for ‘homeless’ people. It was felt that many of these settings could offer young people a medium term, sustainable placement which would prioritise individuals’ health, well-being and ongoing development and that young people did not benefit from the stigma associated with being labelled as ‘homeless’ whilst in this provision. Many commentators asserted that young people were not homeless in these situations.

*I would regard someone in a foyer or a self-contained apartment in supported accommodation, I would regard them as in a settled home... if we are talking about a group home, supported housing with some support which will explicitly have a support plan in place, and there will be a housing future that that young person will be working towards... (National key player)*

*I think supported housing and supported lodgings, and all of that stuff, we shouldn't be seeing young people as homeless when they are in there. They need to be positive environments with young people making progress in their lives... They feel stigmatised by being in hostels, and by the label homelessness, but actually I think we can shift this by shifting how we talk about and view those provisions, and what they do and how they do it... We are in a situation where there are going to be some young people who are going to need support between being in the family home or being in care or whatever it is and living independently on their own. We have got that whole sector that can deliver a lot of that but it's called a youth homelessness sector, and there is something about redefining the purpose of that and seeing it as part of positive pathways rather than fall-back provision. (National key player)*

*Supported housing is a transitional model... a bit like halls of residence, learn to live together, learn some life-skills, make some mistakes, get some support, engage in education, training, low paid work, whatever and then helps them to move on. (National key player)*

*If somebody has an expectation, that they know where they are going to be sleeping for the next 6-12, or maybe compromise on 9 [months] – then they are not actually homeless anymore. But I think we have to build into that, that there is some sort of plan about where they are going to be longer term that that... where are you going to be in 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, otherwise it's a revolving door. (Service provider)*

Whilst this argument was advanced quite strongly, one of the case study authorities did point out an important difference between living in transitional accommodation and university accommodation – that the majority of the latter young people can return to their (parental) home at the end of their stay. The young people interviewed commented that it essentially depended on what type of accommodation they were accessing as to whether they felt homeless there. They also made the point that people were often not assisted to move on quickly enough, and the system of allocating move on did not seem ‘fair’:

*Q: And when you are living in a hostel, does that feel like home or are you still homeless then?*

*R1: You’re still homeless*

*R2: Depends what hostel you are in to tell you the truth, some hostels are nice and some hostels, it feels like you might as well be in jail*

*R1: You can’t do everything you want to do, you have to follow the structure of the hostel like, so that means you are still homeless...*

*R2: I’ve been homeless like since I was little and I know how to look after myself. It’s patronising when you can’t move on because you ‘don’t know how to look after yourself’. Obviously they want to help you but they want to help you when they are ready to help you, I don’t know... There are loads of people who are in hostels and stuff that don’t really need to be in hostels... (Young people)*

*You know something else I hate, how can you move into a hostel and then someone else who has moved in after you, moves out before you.... (Young person)*

Agency commentators considered that it was important that the sector was more flexible in its approach, ‘working with the grain of young people’s lives’, for example being able to work with young parents as well as single people rather than young people having to move when their status changed.

A number of commentators identified supported lodgings as an important aspect of provision for young people in housing need. It was acknowledged that this may not suit all young people, but that for some young people it provided a supportive, stable family setting within which they could begin to learn a range of skills that would help them to live independently later on. There had also been promising outcomes from supported lodgings compared to other supported accommodation (Holmes, 2008) and there was thought to be room for further development of the model, and one that fitted the Government’s agenda to maximise the resources of the wider community.

#### *Importance of housing and support pathways – normalising provision*

There was a firm belief that better routes to independent living were required for young people who had limited support from their families and were unable to take advantage of the support provided with accommodation via higher education routes – offering a parallel pathway for more disadvantaged young people. This might include supported models above but also had to be broader and encompass independent living options. However, there was some scepticism over how this could be achieved within the current political and economic context.

*...For middle class people who go to university you have quite a natural pathway into*

*accommodation: you go into halls of residence and then you meet some friends and you get shared housing etc. I don't know whether there is something around thinking about a range of options that are available that do actually ensure that there are things available for young people who don't follow those routes. Are there cheap accommodation options for people who want to go to further education colleges or who are moving to a new town to take up a new job and those type of things? But ultimately, it is about affordable accommodation and this is a massive issue in this country. There isn't enough cheap housing. (National key player)*

*There is a social justice part of this. If you have got young people going into the HE sector, for example, their housing pathway, and the services to which they have access, is a done deal. It's a package that they get as part of their journey through higher education, and why should it be the case that that is all sorted out for young people who go through the HE route and yet for the 50% or so of young people who don't go through that route, it's all much more complex and much more difficult. That's not right, fundamentally. (National key player)*

Nationally and locally, commentators tended to believe that opportunities to enter social housing were now even more constrained (for example, in one case study, regeneration initiatives had led to a substantial decrease in social housing units available). Entry to social housing was also sometimes contingent on proof of independent living skills and/or adequate support being in place. In Case Study 2, the Local Stock Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) provider, offered a first tenancy scheme, providing furnished tenancies with support for those aged 16 to 21. They also had an 'excellent tenant' scheme whereby applicants had to have lived independently for 12 months with no rent arrears to qualify for a social tenancy. One commentator argued that social housing providers needed to become smarter landlords, including offering pre-tenancy support workshops, and developing a 'youth offer' where they explicitly identify what housing opportunities can be offered to young people. Policies around local connection also need to be reviewed so that young people could, for example, move area to take up a job. Social rented housing clearly remained the housing of choice for the young people interviewed.

There were also major concerns about the present and future role of the private rented sector (PRS) for young people. The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) was still felt to be hugely problematic, and likely to become more so when extended to people up to the age of 35. There was widespread concern that this would mean that private landlords would prefer to take older tenants compared to younger people, displacing under 25s for the available shared accommodation thereby further restricting young people's housing options. At present, there were no incentives for landlords to house young people, and this was only likely to get worse, forcing young people into the lowest quality end of the market. It was however acknowledged that this sector might meet the needs of some young people. In one area, it was felt to be useful as a stepping stone back into social housing where young people needed to establish themselves as a reasonable tenant to the local authority. There was also a realisation that young people simply would have no choice but to contemplate sharing, and providers would need to support them with this as far as possible. There was a worry that cut backs in Supporting People services, including floating support, would make it more difficult to help support young people in the PRS.

As identified in the above section, there was some support for the idea of reconceptualising

the present ‘youth homelessness’ industry towards a more balanced model that could offer constructive intermediate housing opportunities. Recent work has also suggested the potential for the development of young worker ‘hotels’ which could be let at the equivalent rate of the SAR (Rugg, 2010), although this model was being suggested for young workers without support needs. More generally, the high rents associated with supported accommodation were seen as a real barrier to assisting young people towards independence. It could be argued that the further separation of funding for rent and support costs was necessary if young people were ever to be able to make best use of supportive settings. Young people also stressed the problems around the high rents in hostels.

When considering the development of pathways to independent living for young people, it was also stressed that there needed to be room for ‘second chances’, as is likely to be contained in the new guidance for care leavers. The transition from childhood to adulthood inevitably involves making mistakes and encountering set-backs. The opportunity to ‘move back’ was also considered important. Just as many young people move back in with their parents, young people should also be supported to make positive decisions to move back into supported accommodation settings. This is an area that St Basils in Birmingham are proactively developing.

Overall, there was seen to be a need for local strategies focused on housing for young people, rather than one on youth homelessness:

*... Until we have youth housing strategies, as opposed to youth homelessness strategies, we will never actually plan for young people’s transition and their housing needs, and we will always be adopting a deficit model around homelessness. And if anything, we seem further away from that now, than perhaps we were before. So this constant planning to prevent homelessness, as opposed to planning to meet the housing needs of our youth – well, to me, you get what you plan for don’t you? If you have all crisis provision you’ll have crisis. If you have all homelessness provision, you’ll get homelessness. If, however, you recognise that young people do grow up, do need to move on, do have housing issues, and you start to plan for that, from the various backgrounds that they come from, then you are more likely to deal with that issue... You would never dream of only having a homelessness strategy for the entire housing needs of your population, would you? No, we don’t do that. But we do do that in terms of young people. (National key player)*

#### *A statutory route?*

Many commentators argued that there would be no need for a statutory homelessness route if ideal service networks were in place to address young people’s housing needs. Previous research has shown that the statutory system, whilst very important in addressing homelessness, is typically experienced as a negative process (Quilgars *et al*, 2008). There was a general call to provide housing and support services without necessitating someone being defined as homeless:

*...Perhaps we are using it more as a label because it entitles you to support, and certainly that is important, but if there are other routes to access that support then that can be beneficial and you can move away from the label... (National key player)*

However, it was believed that services in this area had improved for young people. For example, in 2008, Case Study 1 set up a central assessment unit for single homeless people, which employs two specialist youth homelessness officers and has a social worker based within the team for three days a week. This ensures that young people only have to approach one service to access the support they need. Similarly, in Case Study 2, a joint housing and social services (now part of children's services) team was set up ten years ago to provide a Child in Need (CIN) assessment of all 16 and 17 year olds (including young parents). Of those assessed in 2009/10, the key outcomes were 30% being placed in supported accommodation, 29% remaining in the parental home and 11% being allocated a supported tenancy. Case Study 2 also has an accommodation officer based in the local youth offending service. Whilst statutory approaches are still required, it was argued by a number of people that a bespoke service for young people was the best way forward, in recognition that homelessness is a risk that may be encountered in the transition to adulthood, and that these risks needed to be managed by specialist workers rather than generic homelessness officers.

Ultimately, there was an argument for a pragmatic approach to statutory homelessness responses. Whilst it would be ideal to eradicate the need for a statutory route, as long as the need still existed, it was pointed out that an enhanced statutory route often improved the housing offer for young people.

#### *The role of families, young people and communities*

It was felt that there was much more scope for working with families to assist young people to remain living with parents or in other kinship arrangements. Recent research has highlighted the positive influences of some family members for the housing trajectories of young homeless people (Mayock *et al*, 2010). The Family Intervention Project was seen as a useful model for those with complex needs but it was also felt that a lack of attention had been placed on supporting parents in managing teenagers more generally, which was acknowledged as a challenging task especially in poor households. Other kinship arrangements could also be better supported enabling young people to live with other relatives or family friends on a longer-term basis than just waiting for them to outstay their welcome.

*Stop causing so much stress on parents so they can take more stress from us, really and truly, as kids are the most stressful things that could ever possibly be created.*  
(Young person)

There was also a strong consensus that there was a culture within some families and communities where it was presumed that young people would leave home at age 16, that parents had by then 'done their bit' and there was a sense of 'entitlement' that the system could then take over. It was believed that parents needed to be 'educated' about parenting as well as the realities of constrained housing supply. It was not felt possible to 'legislate to force' parents to take a greater responsibility for young people, but that more understanding and support for parents in their role could prove beneficial. Nonetheless, it would still be necessary to accept that such a cultural shift was unlikely to occur overnight, given ingrained assumptions built up over generations, and that some young people would be better off leaving the family home. More services run by parents for parents were also seen as a positive way forward.

*I think there needs to be a campaign, whether it's the local authority or central government. I think there needs to be a campaign of educating parents, one around what their responsibility is. The message needs to be out there that if you kick your kid out it doesn't mean they are going to get a council flat. That needs to be out there and heard. Or there needs to be more help there to support parents who don't think they can cope, or help for them to understand what is realistic to expect from a teenager. They might come home drunk, they might come in late, because teenagers break rules, we've all been there, that's what it is about... (Service provider)*

Considering the role of young people themselves, there was also quite a strong argument advanced for supporting an element of conditionality in transitional accommodation (beyond the normal tenancy conditions). The Foyer Federation has recently called for a new foyer social contract that holds all parties to account, enabling young people to pursue their interests rather than simply having some of their actions constrained<sup>23</sup>. This view was echoed more broadly:

*In our experience, conditionality works, in most cases, particularly with the younger age group, 16 to 17 year olds. If they were living in the family home, that is not an unconditional arrangement. There are certain conditions around what you do and don't do, and if you don't meet those expectations, that is when problems can arrive. So there is an element that a conditional element is appropriate for that age group. (National key player)*

There was evidence that young people sometimes felt constrained by the present 'contract' offered by supported accommodation:

*They make people who live in the hostel homeless, like that [clicks fingers]. If you don't listen to what they are doing, they will give a 28 day notice, 24 day notice – do you know how that feels? To get a notice through your door saying you have to leave a hostel – a hostel! Not a flat. And they make you pay some stupid rent for a place that doesn't even feel like home and you can't even have your room how you want. You have to live like you are a little kid. They put latches on your windows – like I'm going to jump out of the first floor and kill myself! (Young person)*

A considerable amount of scepticism was expressed about the potential role of the Big Society in preventing and eradicating youth homelessness, particularly in areas of long-term socio-economic deprivation. However, it was felt that some aspects of this agenda could be used in positive ways. There was particular interest in co-production ideas where services work with communities as a partnership. There might also be useful ways that housing associations and other housing providers could develop their roles as community hubs. It was also acknowledged that young people generally want to stay within or near to their communities, and that solutions need to be more locally focussed rather than expecting young people to move to a city or town centre to access services.

*Different routes for different groups of young people?*

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<sup>23</sup> Unpublished Foyer Federation paper shared with the authors.

Case study representatives were asked to reflect on four ‘vignettes’ or mini-case studies of young people, identifying the key things that would be needed to prevent young people finding themselves homeless (again) in the different situations (Box 4.1). They were also asked to reflect on the extent to which current responses are adequate for young people in these different situations. More generally, all research participants were asked to think about whether we were perhaps closer to ending youth homelessness for some groups of young people than others.

Respondents felt that their local authorities were responding reasonably well to the situation facing the young woman in *Vignette 1*. The young woman would receive a full assessment of her needs to find out whether there might be opportunities for the family conflict to be mediated or whether the situation was such that it was in the young person’s best interests for her to leave the family home. The Southwark judgement was broadly welcomed by respondents, although it was pointed out that nationally responses were known to be highly variable (Twinch, 2011a). Two of the case studies in the study had been undertaking full assessments of young homeless people for some time, having established joint working arrangements with social services prior to the Southwark judgement. The main change here was social services funding the accommodation placement. It was however highlighted that many young people might turn down the offer of an assessment as a ‘child in need’ due to the connotations of being a looked after child. One case study respondent suggested that the young person’s situation in *Vignette 1* could be improved by the assignment of a link worker to the family following any mediation: *‘where there is somewhere that they can call if things are going a bit pear-shaped, rather than go and sort it out and then move out and there be nothing – like a link officer. And I don’t think it would be particularly intensive, it’s just having someone at the end of the phone... At the end of the day, that is a lot less expensive than us having to pick her up and social services having to get involved’*.

**Box 4.1: Vignettes discussed with case study representatives**

1. 16 year old young woman. She is feeling unsafe in the parental home due to conflict with a stepfather. Her main vulnerability is her age.
2. 18 year old care leaver. He has been in care most of his life and experienced a number of residential and foster placements. He has a poor school attendance record, has some learning difficulties and is currently unemployed.
3. 20 year old young man. He has spent the last five years moving between relatives, living with friends, hostels and sleeping rough. He has complex needs, including mental health problems, substance misuse issues and has recently served a short sentence in prison.
4. 22 year old single mother with one child. She has been living with her parents but the house is overcrowded. She has some qualifications and needs practical support with setting up a home and reconnecting with education/work place.

Reflecting the considerable progress made in services for care leavers over the last decade



(Quilgars *et al*, 2008; National Care Advisory Service, 2009), respondents were quite positive about current responses available for care leavers (*Vignette 2*), particularly young people without extremely high support needs. For example, in one area, the Leaving Care Service had supported training flats for care leavers. In another, they highlighted their 'early notification' system to the housing options team to enable young people to move on to appropriate tenancies. In the third, the young person would receive a social nomination if they were ready to live independently. In all three areas, it was felt that services could assist young people to make a transition to independent living without them experiencing homelessness, particularly without them having to apply as homeless to the local authority. It was expected that services for care leavers were likely to be relatively protected under the present spending cuts. It was also noted that new statutory guidance for care leavers was due to be published in April 2011 which was likely to include a new responsibility to ensure that local authorities have sufficient accommodation for care leavers, and a 'staying put' policy. 'Staying Put' pilots are in the process of investigating mechanisms for young people to remain with foster parents after the age of 18. One commentator also suggested that the potential for allowing young people to stay on in children's homes should be explored.

The situation of the young person in *Vignette 3* raised concerns in two local authorities, but the third felt that an adequate response was available in their areas as they had excellent links with both drugs services and offender management systems and supported accommodation for those with complex needs. Other respondents pointed out that there may be a problem whereby the young person would not meet the threshold for interventions for any specialist adult services in mental health or substance misuse. There was also a concern that the young person would have already burnt many bridges, being banned from provision and/or have rent arrears, and options left might be few and far between. Representatives in one area also felt that the young person may not 'engage' with the services available. There were also concerns about the revolving door problem of short-term prisoners. In one local authority (Case Study 1), they had access to a service level agreement to accommodate short-term ex-prisoners, pending accommodation to be arranged in the PRS via the Diamond initiative<sup>24</sup>. Another (Case Study 2) was introducing services via Probation and the local YMCA (assessing housing need whilst people were still in prison). The development of effective services for those leaving custody was seen to be absolutely key to assisting people in similar situations to the young person in *Vignette 3*. More generally, one commentator pointed out that some young people required a greater amount of intensive support than is generally available, some of whom might never be ready for independent living, and this needs to be acknowledged in the planning of services.

*Vignette 4* highlighted the difficulties with accessing mainstream housing. In two case studies, local authority representatives explained that the young woman would need to apply for housing but suggested that overcrowding might not prioritise her case sufficiently to allow a quick housing solution. She may have quite a wait for an allocation of a social housing tenancy and might need to consider the private rented sector. One case study respondent suggested that her best chance would be if her parents stated that they were no longer able to accommodate her. In this situation, she would get priority need status under the homelessness legislation. The third case study emphasised that the young woman sounded quite 'sorted', and one of the key areas of assistance required was effective support to enable her to access and sustain education and/or employment opportunities.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://lcjb.cjsonline.gov.uk/London/3106.html>

### *Taking account of the local context*

Case study respondents highlighted some quite specific local or regional issues that had implications for addressing youth homelessness. It was felt that, although an ideal service network in any local authority would need to offer a similar range of responses, it must also take account of specific issues at the local level.

In one case study, it was explained that the area had experienced high levels of socio-economic deprivation for at least two generations. Cultural assumptions and behaviour were embedded, aspirations low and opportunities few. Alcohol had become the primary response to this deprivation. Young people often had parents who drank heavily, and they in turn often had alcohol issues. These problems were very difficult to address given both their family and wider societal issues with alcohol.

*I think the economic situation in [area] has to be taken into account. I mean it's a long term economically deprived area, for generations. That inevitably has an impact for a lot of the young people we are dealing with [who] come from families... [where] possibly their grandparents were the last people to have stable incomes. Therefore a culture has grown up around that, a level of attitudes or beliefs about themselves, self-confidence in families... That this is how it is. (Service provider)*

In the London authority, they were experiencing a large problem with young people being involved in gangs, with parents often excluding their children due to not being able to cope with police coming around and so on. It was also reported that there was a significant problem of young people in care being part of gangs. The authority has a protocol with the youth offending service, but it is very difficult to place these young people as they frequently need to move out of the area.

Two areas were also concerned with the position of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. In the mixed rural/urban case study, ethnicity did not appear to be an issue, but they were currently funding a specific project to check this and ensure that they were reaching young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. In the London Borough case study, the situation was reversed. They were receiving a disproportionately large proportion of referrals from young people from ethnic minorities which was a cause of concern and something that providers felt very strongly needed to be analysed when considering youth homelessness

*... If you don't address the race issue, when you are looking at homelessness, how can you address it? How can you address it, if the majority of the people are African-Caribbean and you are going to take it as a generic kind of homelessness issue, and not include race. You are not going to solve that. (Service provider)*

It should be noted that the situation of young refugees was not explicitly explored within the case studies, however it is known that a significant proportion of Centrepoint's clients across London are refugees. These young people are likely to have different support needs from young people for whom the UK is their country of origin.

One case study also raised an issue around parents having different expectations of young women and young men. In this case study, representatives reported cases where parents, particularly mothers, appeared to be much ‘harsher’ on their daughters compared to sons in terms of expectations of behaviour required to remain in the parental home.

### *Improving inter-agency working*

Inter-agency working was thought to have substantially improved over the last decade (see also Quilgars *et al*, 2008). However, a number of areas were mentioned that still needed further development and would need to be in place to achieve an aim to end homelessness.

Generally, there was a feeling that responses for young people aged 18 or over were less developed than for those aged 16 and 17. Previous research has highlighted that 16 and 17 year olds tend to receive a better housing and support response in the UK than in other EU countries. This appears to be related in part to them being accorded a high priority within adult homelessness services, compared to a low priority in children’s services in some EU countries (Stephens *et al*, 2010). Nonetheless it was felt that there was still a problem at the transition point between child and adult services for those turning 18.

A problem was identified of young people (particularly those with complex needs) being passed from one service to another and sometimes finding it difficult to have to tell their story endlessly, and more importantly establish meaningful relationships with new support workers. Discussions would seem to support the identification of a ‘trusted adult’ for a young person who could follow them over time, irrespective of whether they are living in supported accommodation, with parents or independently. It was recognised that this principle was hard to implement both operationally and due to cost considerations. An interesting initiative had recently been developed in Birmingham by St Basils that went some way towards this ideal. Here, the provision of housing management services and accommodation related support has been separated. It is hoped that this service will better reflect the realities of independent living where people have a landlord (or mortgage provider) and then people who support you separately. It also means that a support worker can follow the person and not just the scheme. An evaluation of this type of initiative would prove useful as it may be something that could be extended more broadly.

It was felt that there may still be room to better manage the transitional accommodation sector for young people currently in place. Whilst there was evidently a good amount of communication between individual agencies, one suggestion was the implementation of ‘single gateways’ to services, as have been introduced in some areas, so that people did not have to make multiple referrals using different systems.

There was a particular call for young person’s housing needs to be incorporated into other care pathways, with the mental health strategy and work around health more generally being one of the highest priorities. It was believed that mental health had not been given a high enough priority in youth homelessness, and this was extremely important especially in light of recent research on the links between complex trauma and homelessness (Maguire, 2009).

*I think there is an opportunity to focus more on the inter-connectiveness of services... The new focus on public health coming very clearly from the coalition*

*government, [provides a chance] to really engage with the issue of multiple exclusions and to focus on the young people who have been really let down generation after generation by traditional services... (National key player)*

The role of education, training and employment in addressing youth homelessness will remain key. An ideal network would be seen as offering good quality training opportunities to create 'parity of esteem' with academic qualifications. The further development of apprenticeships<sup>25</sup> can be seen as a positive move here, although these only start at NVQ Level 2, excluding the most disadvantaged young people unless they are given adequate support to complete Level 1 training. One commentator felt that we could really energise the agenda around learning, including removing some of the worst financial barriers to access, possibly through exploring the personalisation agenda:

*[We need] much more personalisation for the most vulnerable as well. We work very hard at trying to contain young people in situations that aren't really working for them, and we need to step outside of some of that and be a lot more flexible. I think there is a lot to learn from the personalisation work that is happening with other client groups, rough sleepers and some of adult social care client groups. (National key player)*

There was also a call for more financial support for families to help them continue to provide a home to young people:

*There is a disincentive to retain a stroppy 16 year old at home! From a financial angle, from overcrowding, from relationship issues, all those kinds of things. There are all those kinds of disincentives. So if you want them to keep them at home, let's make it much easier to keep them at home. (National key player)*

Whilst generally commentators were concerned about the lack of resources for the sector in the future, they were more positive about potentially improving joint working, in part arising from the more difficult decisions that will be made on resources:

*I think it could mean that there is a lot more joint working going on. I don't just mean within [local authority] but across [local authorities], across regions. Because we might lose resources but places like [local authority] will just be decimated. So it could be that we all start working a bit more collaboratively to fix the problem... and then we might have access to services that we don't usually have access to... (Service provider)*

## **Conclusion**

Overall, while commentators felt that it was unlikely that an aim to end youth homelessness would ever be achieved in an absolute sense, there was a fair amount of support for the adoption of such an aim if it could be broken down into a series of more realistic objectives. However, some people warned against redefining youth homelessness to disguise some aspects of the problem or adopting targets that could not be met. The second half of the chapter demonstrated that commentators felt that much needed to be put into place to

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/>

provide an adequate service network to eradicate, or minimise youth homelessness. There was a call for both better utilising the existing supported accommodation sector and developing housing pathways for young people more generally.

## 5 Conclusions

This Think-Piece was commissioned by Centrepoin to consider the concept and task of ending youth homelessness in the UK. As the conceptual review showed, an aim to end homelessness is increasingly being adopted at a European and international level, most recently by the Jury of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (2011). This last chapter returns to the central research questions. Following a review of the scale of youth homelessness, the chapter discusses the value of adopting an aim to end youth homelessness, how ending youth homelessness might be realistically defined, and what a service network would need to look like at the local level to achieve this.

### **What is the scale of youth homelessness?**

It can be estimated that at least 78,000-80,000 young people experienced homelessness in 2008/9 across the UK. This included both young people who were formally accepted as homeless under the statutory definition, as well as young people who were utilising supported housing services for young people who were defined as being (formerly) non-statutorily homeless by professionals. It also included an estimated 3,800 young people who slept rough over the same period. The estimate includes both single young people and families. Whilst there was likely to be some double counting across the different data-sets, there was also considerable missing data on some variables and for some countries, and the estimate only included young people who were in touch with formal services. It can therefore be concluded that this estimate is likely to be a minimum number of young people affected by homelessness in a year.

Whilst it is known that the numbers of young people formally accepted as statutorily homeless has shown a steady decrease over recent years in England, this is not reflected across the UK, and overall the numbers of young people presenting in housing need has remained similar in the last five years. Prevention activities in England have meant that more young people approaching local authorities are assisted to resolve their housing issues, for example via family mediation or support to manage a tenancy, without being formally assessed as homeless.

Youth homelessness clearly remains a significant issue across the UK. Previous reviews (Quilgars *et al*, 2008) have evidenced the detrimental effects of homelessness on young people, especially for prolonged periods. The present task of examining ways to end youth homelessness is therefore an important one. Should such an aim be adopted, it is however likely that methods of data collection need to be improved to better measure any progress in meeting this aim over time.

### **Should we adopt an aim to end youth homelessness?**

Centrepoin's mission is to end youth homelessness. This aim could also be adopted by other voluntary organisations, individual local authorities and/or national governments. Commentators in this review expressed a view that local and national governments were most likely to be in the best position to pursue any such aim.

Overall, there was considerable support expressed, in principle, for adopting an aim to end youth homelessness, as this was felt to be morally right in the context of a developed society

like the UK, irrespective of the prevailing economic climate. There was a minority who did not support this aim as they felt there was a risk it could lead to ‘disguising’ young people’s homelessness.

However, commentators were not convinced that such an aim could be realised fully, as the underlying causes of youth homelessness are rooted in the wider societal context, and it is impossible to eliminate family conflict and relationship breakdown. A certain level of ‘frictional’ homelessness, whereby a relatively small number of young people might find themselves in a homeless situation for a short period of time, must therefore be expected.

Nonetheless, most commentators appeared to suggest that it could still be useful to adopt an aim to end youth homelessness to help achieve a major reduction in youth homelessness (by harnessing resources and galvanising activity). Some commentators did however express some reservations about the adoption of this aim depending on how it was formulated – again there was a concern that homelessness could be redefined to enable the goal to be reached more easily.

Some commentators spoke about the merit of adopting an aim that actually went further than ending youth homelessness to ensuring that there are adequate housing options to enable disadvantaged young people to make an effective transition to adulthood and to reach their full potential (without experiencing homelessness).

### **How could ending youth homelessness be realistically defined?**

There was a general consensus that any aim to end youth homelessness would need to be broken down into understandable and achievable objectives. Both ‘youth’ and ‘homelessness’ could have very broad definitions, and it was likely that aspects of both would need to be explicitly defined. It was felt to be important that any such aim should clearly state which specific aspects of youth homelessness were being addressed and not addressed – it would not be acceptable to concentrate on achievable objectives and for other aspects of homelessness to be ignored in this process.

It might be useful for specific goals to be formulated with reference to the ETHOS definition of homelessness and housing exclusion. This could provide a useful starting point although it might need to be adapted to ensure its direct relevance to young people. In the first instance, specific objectives could be formulated with reference to the first two categories of ETHOS, that is ‘rooflessness’ (sleeping rough, using night shelters) and ‘houselessness’ (including living in hostels for homeless people and people due to be released from institutions). However, ultimately, any aim would also need to take account of young people living in ‘insecure’ arrangements (sofa surfing, squatting etc) and those in ‘inadequate’ housing, for example situations of overcrowding.

We would propose the following set of objectives, inspired by parallel attempts to end rough sleeping and by international developments in this field:

- No young person should sleep rough for more than one night once in contact with an appropriate statutory or voluntary sector agency.
- Young people should not have to stay in emergency accommodation for longer than an agreed specified period (for example, three months).

- Young people should not remain in transitional accommodation when it is appropriate for them to move onto more independent accommodation.
- All young people leaving an institutional setting (care, hospital, prison) should have a suitable housing destination, with relevant support, before discharge.
- All young people who cannot remain in the parental home should be offered suitable accommodation and support within a defined pathway plan to independence.

For every objective adopted, it would be helpful for a baseline assessment of the situation to be undertaken and possibly mechanisms put into place to measure progress against the goal. However, these would need to be formulated carefully as commentators had mixed views on the imposition of targets/time periods for achieving any objectives. Some thought that this might put unrealistic pressure on providers unless relevant resources were forthcoming. Alternatively, national government could specify the objectives but local authorities could be left to decide how best to meet them, taking account of the local context.

## **What kind of service network would be needed to eliminate youth homelessness?**

### *Youth housing strategy*

The research identified a need for local areas to draw up a housing strategy for young people. This would encompass action required to prevent and address youth homelessness, but within a broader remit of ensuring that local housing markets, including both private and social housing provision, are able to respond to the housing needs of young people. A youth housing strategy could be linked to the local housing strategy that local authorities already prepare. This youth housing strategy would address the needs of all young people, and would encompass all tenures. It could therefore examine issues such as entry to home ownership, quality of the PRS and specialist transitional accommodation. However, there would be a need to specifically concentrate on those young people with the least resources and lowest incomes who are at the greatest risk of experiencing a chaotic housing pathway (Rugg, 2010).

### *Prevention*

For many decades, there has been an assumption that young people should remain in the parental home if they do not have adequate resources to live independently. This policy tends to work much better for families who have sufficient social and financial capital to support this. More recently, the homelessness prevention agenda has attempted to work proactively with young people at risk of homelessness and their families to enable them to stay/return home if this is safe for them to do so. Considerable progress has been made in developing this agenda, with services such as mediation and local authority homelessness teams undertaking home visits to attempt to help resolve issues within the household. This research has pointed to the need to undertake further prevention work in this area. More specifically, there is a call for more support to parents of teenagers before tensions arise, recognising the difficult task parents are undertaking, particularly with limited household resources. Some of this support could be peer support and organised by parents themselves. There is also likely to be a need for support from specialist parenting services. For the younger age groups (16 and 17 year olds), part of this work will include challenging unhelpful cultural norms which exist in communities where parenting obligations, at least



with respect to providing a home, are seen to end at age 16. Welfare benefit arrangements for families with young people still at home should be reviewed, and we must be alert to the possibility that recent welfare changes – particularly with respect to the up-rating of non-dependent deductions within Housing Benefit from April 2011, as well as the removal of the five bedroom Local Housing Allowance rate from the same date – may make it even more difficult for some young people to remain living at home in low income households. It should also be recognised that some young people are brought up within wider kinship arrangements, and that extended family members caring for teenagers might also require targeted support to make such arrangements sustainable.

One of the clearest messages arising from the research was a call for the development of ‘respite’ arrangements, whereby young people could move to safe, high quality accommodation for a short period of time to give them and their families a ‘breather’, and provide a supportive environment for all parties to rebuild their emotional resilience and renegotiate relationships. Such respite arrangements could be highly cost-effective if, for example, a two week stay could remove the need for a young person to leave home in an unplanned way and become homeless.

#### *The statutory response*

In an ideal network, there would be no need for a statutory response to homelessness. However, whilst homelessness does exist, even at a much reduced level, arguments were advanced for bespoke services to be available for young people, rather than for them having to use the same routes as adults, particularly for 16 and 17 year olds but ideally for all young people up until the age of 24. This would build on the recent Southwark judgement which recognised the specific and additional needs of young people. As part of this, young people should only be placed in emergency accommodation designed exclusively for their age group. A bespoke service again would recognise that young people were making a ‘transition’ to independent living, rather than simply failing to access or maintain tenancies. More generally, there was a call for one-stop, holistic, advice services for young people which enabled them to investigate housing options before finding themselves at imminent risk of homelessness.

#### *Housing and support options*

However, not all young people will be able to remain in the parental home until they are in a position to move out and support themselves. This means that they are likely to experience homelessness unless a range of housing and support options is available for them to move out in a planned way. It is also likely that parents are more likely to support them for an extended period if they are aware that options might become available for young people at some stage. Some lessons might be learned here from the pathways approach to planning for care leavers, where different types of support may be available for young people at different stages and ages.

#### *Transitional accommodation*

Overall, there was a large degree of support for re-examining the existing range of transitional accommodation models that are presently available for homeless young people. In this respect, there was little support for a predominately Housing First approach to young

people's housing and support needs. For the younger age group, particularly those aged 16 and 17, it was felt that supported accommodation was likely to be necessary for many (though not all) young people as they were unlikely to have developed sufficient life-skills to be ready to live independently. Transitional accommodation might also be useful for older young people if this can be offered as a positive opportunity, for example to live in a foyer whilst undertaking a further education course. However, the present system does not offer housing opportunities for young people so much as try and provide a good quality environment for those who are homeless and have no other options. A considerable problem also exists whereby young people often became 'stuck' in this provision (or move between different hostels and supported accommodation settings) with few chances to move-on in a planned way. The entry point, and sometimes the exit point, is homelessness. Whether or not someone is homeless whilst living in the accommodation can be debated. This could be argued to be dependent on the sustainability of the housing offer (Good quality accommodation? Can the young person stay there for a period of time that allows them a settled base from which to study or work?), but also on whether the young person has any alternatives to this provision. Most cannot return to the parental home, and if they have no opportunities for moving on within a specified period, it could be argued that they remain homeless. In order to end homelessness, this sector, working with national and local government would therefore need to develop a different housing offer for young people.

There is also a need for a review of the funding mechanisms of existing transitional accommodation options for young people. At present, there is a perception that provision is only affordable for young people on benefits, which further traps young people in homelessness as it is more difficult to progress their working lives. It is likely that new funding mechanisms will need to be developed that separate the charges for rent and support.

Most commentators argued that there was inequity within the present system of housing and support for young people. For example, those young people who go to university are usually able to access halls of residence accommodation for at least one year, and there may also be schemes to support entry to the private rented sector. Could similar provision be offered to those undertaking apprenticeships or other further education study?

There is also a need to develop pathways that allow young people to trial independence moving between varying stages of independence without penalties for moving back into more supportive environments. Whilst this may be possible within the present system by default, again this may not be offered in a planned way, rather people may fail in one setting and try to access another. St Basils newly modeled provision in Birmingham is one exception to this. This model is already built into the experience of many middle class young people who often move between student housing and the parental home.

It was not felt that highly interventionist and assertive methods of responding to youth homelessness, akin to models being used for rough sleepers, were particularly required when attempting to end youth homelessness. However, it was felt that young people did need to understand their responsibilities as part of the transition to adulthood, but it was also important that this was a two-way contract and providers were able to deliver services of a high standard.

### *Independent housing*

Both move-on, and move-out, opportunities are required as part of any youth housing strategy that is likely to be effective at ending or minimising youth homelessness. Although transitional accommodation was likely to play an important role in any youth housing strategy, it was thought important that it was not presumed that all young people were unable to live independently, as some were, and were being held back by the present system.

It has to be acknowledged that young people who were brought up in social housing may aspire to this type of provision as much as young people with experience of home ownership will hope to become home owners one day. Given the acute shortage of social rented tenancies in many parts of the country, it may be that expectations have to be moderated but people's hopes for the future cannot be dismissed without offering viable alternatives.

However given the restricted stock, more work is required for the PRS to offer a good housing offer to young people on very low incomes. As recent research has pointed out, there are many sectors of the PRS, and a shared house for young professionals offers a very different living environment from a HMO (Rugg, 2010). This needs to be recognised, with accreditation schemes and social letting agencies an important part of the response here, alongside tenancy training and support to new tenants. There was significant concern that the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate up until the age of 35 will disadvantage those aged under 25 as they attempt to compete for restricted number of properties in this sector. It will be necessary to monitor this at both the national and local level and examine ways of increasing opportunities for younger people to access appropriate properties.

### *Supporting the transition to independence*

All young people need trusted adults to guide them towards adulthood. Many are fortunate to receive considerable (financial and emotional) support from parents, as well as teachers and other community leaders. Disadvantaged young people at risk of homelessness often miss out on much of this support. The provision of effective support services to assist young people to achieve – and maintain – independence will be essential if homelessness is to be eradicated or minimised. This will include targeted tenancy floating support for those living independently. Research has indicated that housing support workers often provide valued support to young people (Pleace *et al*, 2008), but that they are not always available to young people who need them (Crane *et al*, 2011). There are also concerns about the impact of cuts to Supporting People funding and whether this could actually increase the risk of homelessness. The availability of specialist health and care services, including mental health services, for young people is also key. There may also be considerable value in mentoring schemes which could be provided within the third sector. Traditionally some of this role was provided by older workers in employment: such schemes could be replicated in apprenticeships. All parts of local communities, including statutory providers, formal voluntary sector providers and the community sector, need to work with young people to support the increasingly extended and challenging transition to independence. Ideally, trusted adults or mentors should not be tied to any one provision, nor be time limited, but should be able to support young people, as needed, throughout the transition to adulthood.

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