

Tackling Youth Homelessness

Policy Briefing 18



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On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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Summary

This policy briefing is the latest in a series that has covered issues such as providing more settled homes, homelessness prevention, domestic violence, employment and health. The series offers advice to local authorities and their partners on the Government's homelessness agenda and its key policy issues and priorities.

This briefing focuses on the work of central Government, local authorities and the voluntary and community sector to prevent and tackle youth homelessness.

Introduction

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN CONTEXT

The number of young people aged 16-17 seeking housing assistance from local authorities in England because they are homeless or at risk of homelessness is relatively high, compared to other groups. In 2005/6 8,350 young people aged 16 and 17 (together with 18-20 year old care leavers) were accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need specifically because of their age, and therefore owed a main homelessness duty. This represents 9% of all homeless acceptances by local housing authorities in England. Other young people will fall into other priority need categories, e.g. having dependent children or being a pregnant woman.

	16-17 year olds	18-20 year old care leavers	TOTAL	Total Acceptances	% Young people
2003/04	10,060	1,000	11,060	135,430	8%
2004/05	9,480	1,070	10,560	120,860	9%
2005/06	7,440	900	8,350	93,980	9%

Source - CLG PIE Homelessness returns (quarterly)

The Government has strengthened the statutory protection available for young people who are at risk of homelessness in England and encouraged local authorities to take positive steps to tackle youth homelessness. 16 and 17 year olds (with certain exceptions) and young people aged between 18 and 20 who were formerly in care have a priority need for accommodation under the homelessness legislation (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996). This means they must be secured suitable accommodation if they become homeless through no fault of their own. The relatively high number of young people who have been accepted by local authorities as being owed a main homelessness duty reflects the fact that more young people are getting the help they need.

More generally, we know that young people under 25 make up a relatively high proportion of acceptances under the homelessness legislation:

Age of applicants accepted 2005/06		
Age group	2005/06	Percentage
16 – 24	36,770	39%
25 – 44	44,450	47%
45 – 59	8,710	9%
60 – 64	1,440	2%
65 – 74	1,710	2%
75 & Over	900	1%
Total applicant households accepted	93,980	

Source - CLG PIE Homelessness returns (quarterly)

The Government's strategy for tackling youth homelessness

The Government's homelessness strategy *Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives* was published in March 2005. Among other things, it recognises that young people can become homeless for a wide range of often complex reasons. The Government is committed to reducing homelessness amongst all groups, including young people. Communities and Local Government is working across Government and with local authorities and voluntary sector partners to:

- prevent vulnerable young people becoming homeless, through early identification and intervention;
- support homeless young people and those living in temporary accommodation to ensure their housing and wider support needs are met;
- manage the transition of young people between temporary and settled accommodation to ensure continued access to the services they need.

Case Study 1: Brighton & Hove's Strategy for tackling youth homelessness 2007-10

Brighton & Hove City Council published their Youth Homelessness Strategy in November 2006. The strategy has been jointly developed by the Council's Housing Strategy Division and Brighton & Hove's Children & Young People's Trust. It forms an integral part of the wider Homelessness Strategy and Children & Young People's Plan. The strategy establishes an integrated and proactive approach to address both the housing need and wider causes of homelessness amongst young people locally. The strategy is underpinned by 5 core objectives:

- intervene early to prevent homelessness;
- provide support to vulnerable young people;
- address the underlying causes of youth homelessness;
- prevent a new generation of rough sleepers;
- provide a wider range of housing options for young people.

Developing Youth Homelessness Strategies – Some lessons learned from Brighton & Hove

Brighton & Hove's Youth Homelessness Working Group found that the 9 month process of developing the strategy proved more important than the final strategy document itself. The development process has helped to ensure that investment decisions are based on need; targeted at prevention; and that a whole systems approach to planning and commissioning is adopted.

Brighton & Hove's Strategy is now being used by commissioners, providers and partner organisations as a reference point for their work. It has quickly become a living document rather than sitting on a shelf gathering dust. This has been achieved by the considerable time spent ensuring the correct corporate and stakeholder commitment to the strategy. Recent outcomes have included:

- establishing a multi-agency single point of access for 16/17 year olds at Hove YMCA's Youth Advice Centre;
- establishing an Integrated Support Pathway for young people, care leavers and young offenders;
- developing a prevention of eviction protocol for young people's supported accommodation services;
- establishing a new supported move-on housing project as part of the move towards ending the use of B&B for young homeless people.

A copy of the strategy is available at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk. For further information and feedback, contact nick.hibberd@brighton-hove.gov.uk

New package of measures, delivered through a national youth homelessness scheme

On 14 November 2006, Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, announced a package of measures to further prevent and tackle youth homelessness, through:

- a commitment that by 2010, no 16 or 17 year olds should be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation by a local authority under the homelessness legislation, except in an emergency;
- improving access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people), so that there is a universal expectation of such services;
- establishing supported lodgings schemes across the country, providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home.

Communities and Local Government recognises the crucial role played by our voluntary and community sector partners in preventing and tackling youth homelessness nationally and locally. To help deliver on these commitments and ensure a holistic approach to tackling youth homelessness, the Department is commissioning a new national youth homelessness scheme, to be delivered by a range of voluntary and community sector agencies and jointly led by Centrepoint and YMCA England.

The scheme will develop strategic and operational responses that prevent, and reduce the overall level of, youth homelessness in England. The aim will be to ensure that young people's wider support needs are tackled appropriately and supportively. The scheme will explore, evidence, validate and disseminate established and innovative models of good practice to ensure that there are appropriate alternatives to the use of B&B accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds threatened with homelessness.

Agencies with specialist expertise will develop guidance on good practice. The lead agencies and their partners will promote dissemination events and other processes using the internet and local authority 'beacons' of good practice. These will enable local authorities and their partners to deliver different approaches to preventing, tackling and managing youth homelessness.

The many elements that can contribute to strategies to prevent and tackle homelessness amongst 16 and 17 year olds will be covered by the initiative. These include:

- Mediation and home visiting
- School-based work
- Various approaches to local authorities' assessment and advice responsibilities
- Supported lodgings and Nightstop schemes
- Floating support
- Emergency and short-term hostels
- Forms of 'move-on' from hostels
- Responding to complex needs and high vulnerability
- Health issues including physical and mental health, contraception and sexual health, and substance and alcohol misuse
- Promoting engagement in learning and employment
- Responding to the particular needs of young people in specific groups, including regarding gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and faith.
- Offenders and offending, and tackling anti-social behaviour

The project will be organised in four work-streams:

- **Early intervention and prevention**, to be led by YMCA England
- **Addressing accommodation needs**, to be led by YMCA England
- **Addressing wider non-accommodation needs**, to be led by Centrepont.
- **Dissemination and communication**, to be led by Centrepont on behalf of all the partners.

For more information or to highlight particular elements of good practice contact Johanna Holmes (j.holmes@centrepont.org) or Jo Gunner (jo.gunner@england.ymca.org.uk).

Working with local authorities

Communities and Local Government will work with local authorities as they continue to implement and revise their homelessness strategies. The Department has appointed a new specialist adviser on youth homelessness, who will work with local authorities as they work towards meeting the 2010 commitment to phase out the use of B&B for 16 and 17 year olds.

The Department is contacting both those local authorities with high numbers of 16/17 year olds in B&B and those which offer a range of alternative services. We will be working with them, and with the new national scheme, to understand and share 'what works' and how local authorities have overcome barriers to support the development of alternatives to B&B accommodation.

Prevention and early intervention

SAFE MOVES

Safe Moves is a proven early intervention model aimed at preventing homelessness amongst 13 – 19 year olds, through a combination of peer mentoring, informal life skills training and family mediation. There is a clear 'spend to save' argument in intervening early to prevent homelessness occurring. *Communities and Local Government* is funding Foyer to roll out the Safe Moves model in 2006/7, encouraging its adoption by local authorities.

The Safe Moves pilot phase ran from October 2002 to April 2004 in four areas. Building on the experience gained by Safe in the City¹, Safe Moves projects aim to identify 13-20 year-olds at risk of homelessness during their transition to adulthood. The projects are based around **peer mentoring, family mediation and life skills training**. The intention is that some young people will be enabled to continue living at home, by improving relationships with their parents/carers.

The Safe Moves pilots required joint working from a range of local agencies, including Connexions, children's services, housing services, youth justice/probation workers, educational welfare officers and foyer workers, all of whom supported clients referred to Safe Moves.

The Centre for Housing Policy (CHP) at the University of York evaluated the Safe Moves initiative and reported in September 2004 (the report can be accessed at www.foyer.net). The key success of the service in terms of outcomes was in supporting young people to remain in the parental home. The vast majority of young people referred whilst living in the parental home were still living there at the end of the pilot or when their case was closed. A small number of young people also successfully moved back to the parental home from insecure housing.

A calculation of unit costs in the CHP evaluation revealed an average cost per client ranging between £500 and £1,400 across the four projects, with an overall average of approximately £1,000 (excluding 'in-kind' costs). This compared to an average cost of £400 a week for a hostel bed, £650 for processing a local authority homelessness application and £2,800 for a failed tenancy. For the young people aged under 16, foster care costed an average of £593 a week. Given the benefits of Safe Moves in assisting young people at risk of homelessness to remain safely in the parental home, the evaluation concluded that an effective Safe Moves service represents good value for money.

A follow-up study has re-interviewed a small sample of young people two years after taking part in the Safe Moves pilot initiatives (CHP draft report September 2006). This is a small qualitative study with a response rate of 43% and a total of 10 successful interviews so results must be treated with caution. However, the study shows that most of this group of young people were currently in settled housing situations and in employment or training. They felt that Safe Moves had made a difference to their lives, some saying explicitly that they might well have become homeless had it not been for Safe Moves, while others talked about improvements to their health and general well-being which they attributed to the support provided.

1 Safe in the City, an independent charity and action research organisation, was set up in 1998 by Centrepoint and the Peabody Trust to pilot and evaluate new ways of preventing youth homelessness. Eight cluster projects were established in London to work with young people and their families delivering family support, skills and employability and personal development services. The organisation closed in 2004 but the experience of the initiative is recorded on: <http://www.safeinthecity.org.uk/>.

PREVENTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS WITH HOMELESSNESS MEDIATION

A good homelessness mediation service can provide an effective intervention to prevent youth homelessness in parental exclusion cases.

Communities and Local Government is funding Relate, the national provider of family counselling and mediation services, to pilot an innovative new homelessness mediation service that introduces a therapeutic element to the mediation process. It aims to help parties develop positive strategies to avoid homelessness and is anticipated to be particularly appropriate in parental exclusion cases.

The two year pilot is underway in selected regions. The service provides therapeutic mediation between young people and their parents, guardians, family members or friends to enable them to negotiate their own solutions; it also works with couples of all ages. It addresses the emotional and practical issues which cause family breakdown, empowering housing applicants to rebuild relationships and reduce conflict.

Relate has also developed a new Standards Framework for Homelessness Mediation for local authorities setting up a new service, those assessing an existing one and other agencies in the homelessness prevention sector. This new model draws on Relate's own work in the field of homelessness prevention and combines feedback from housing authorities, service providers and service users.

To find where the pilot is available, contact Ross Lynn at: [mwac@relate.org.uk](mailto:mvac@relate.org.uk)
The Standards Framework for Homelessness Mediation can be downloaded from the Relate website: www.relate.org.uk or requested from [mwac@relate.org.uk](mailto:mvac@relate.org.uk)

Case Study 2: Alone in London – using mediation to prevent homelessness

Alone in London was established in 1972 and has evolved to meet the needs of vulnerable young people under the age of 26, and today aims to prevent homelessness. Alone in London provides crisis intervention and longer term support. They do this through the following core services based in Kings Cross (05-06 figures):

- Reception (over 4000 calls)
- Advice & Assessment (1,496 young people, 773 new to the service)
- Training & Employment (80 young people new to the service)
- Advocacy (140 young people)
- Family Mediation Service (290 young people seen in groups, 205 individual cases of whom 78% participated in some form of conflict resolution/mediation reaching various positive outcomes)

Family Mediation Service

65% of services users cite conflict or family breakdown as the main reason for support. The service began in 1996 to help reduce and prevent family conflict, breakdown and ultimately homelessness. It does this by facilitating constructive and improved communication between family members. In 2004 the service developed National Accreditation Standards for this type of mediation in partnership with Mediation UK and now has the first such accredited practitioners in Britain. The service currently works with 12 Local Authorities, 5 Local Educational Authorities and 5 Youth Offending Teams.

Outcomes of Mediation

These can be many and varied, and are defined by the parties. They will highlight the young person's housing situation, but will also display the variety of long-term benefits achieved including improved conflict resolution and communications skills. Of the 205 young people who took part in conflict resolution/family mediation procedures (05-06 figures); 38% resolved conflict during stage 1; 27% were helped to find alternative safe accommodation; 40% of the young people who went through the mediation process remained at/returned home. There has been an added focus on working with parents; of the 29 parents worked with 100% reported improved relationships.

For further information regarding Supportive Relations, please contact danielleratcliffe@als.org.uk or for the Family Mediation Service adrianpennington@als.org.uk

YMCA England – ‘Step In’ Project

YMCA England’s ‘Step In’ project, funded by *Communities and Local Government*, aims to improve the assessment services, facilities, and support offered to young people aged 16 to 17 who are, or may be, homeless. This is facilitated by local housing authorities contracting-out to YMCAs in England the function of assessing applications for housing assistance from 16-17 year olds under the homelessness legislation.

The aim of this service is to enable YMCAs to offer the most appropriate housing options to homeless 16-17 year olds, working in partnership to meet local authorities’ statutory obligations, in a cost-effective way. This will help to reduce the number of young people placed in B&B accommodation and other forms of inappropriate temporary accommodation. This scheme helps meet Government targets for increasing the Voluntary & Community Sector’s role in public service delivery and may be suitable for delivery at a regional or sub-regional level.

The needs of the 16 to 17 age group, and the skills required to support them, are very different to the needs of other homeless groups. Many voluntary sector providers are skilled and experienced in working with young people at times when they are in greatest need. The project facilitates partnerships between YMCAs and local authorities that tackle homelessness amongst this age group by:

1. Under contract to the local housing authority to assess 16/17 year olds when they first apply for housing assistance, a Youth Housing Worker carries out a holistic assessment. Homelessness, although often perceived to be the reason for seeking assistance, may not be the primary reason for the referral. The assessment includes:
 - checks for ‘looked-after’ status, links with Connexions/Children’s Trusts and aims to engage most suitable support services.
 - opening discussions with home: can the young person stay there or return there with some mediation
2. Using mediation services between young people and parents/carers to facilitate early home returns, limit damaging fracturing of parent/young person relations and prevent the need to be placed in temporary accommodation for long periods
3. Providing alternative short-term accommodation (hostels, foyers, supported lodgings) will facilitate either an early return home, or a planned move to independent living accommodation

-
4. Delivering an educational programme to school-age children and young people, highlighting the problems of homelessness, and the support available to prevent homelessness, and developing parent and child communication and conflict resolution skills

The Step In project will be working closely with the new national youth homelessness scheme.

Case Study 3: Mendip YMCA and Mendip District Council

Mendip YMCA and Mendip District Council report a high degree of success in their approach to homelessness prevention for 16/17 year olds. Funded through the District Council, Somerset Social Services and Supporting People, Mendip YMCA provides practical services and plays an active role in the development of local services, taking part in local strategic planning forums and chairing the Mendip Supported Housing Forum.

Prevention begins early with interactive workshops in schools with year 11. Once a young person turns 16, and is in housing need, then the Local Authority funds YMCA drop-in services to help to prevent or delay homelessness or arrange alternative accommodation. The YMCA offers:

- Mediation services
- Supported Lodgings
- Resettlement support
- Supported Accommodation
- Private Rented Sector Accommodation

For further information contact:

Karen Deverell, Mendip YMCA, kdeverell@mendipymca.org.uk

Wendy Robertson, Mendip District Council, robertsonw@mendip.gov.uk

Case Study 4: Telford & Wrekin Council and the STAY project

Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC) contracts with Telford Christian Council's STAY project to provide housing options advice for 16-25 year olds.

Two full-time Homeless Investigations Officers (HIOs) familiar with working with young adults, are employed by STAY to carry out a prevention of homelessness service and to consider applications for housing assistance on the Council's behalf. Decisions on homelessness are informed by HIOs with final decisions remaining with the Housing Options team leader.

Working closely with the council team, HIOs refer to Local Authority staff for legal advice, discuss case-loads and join team meetings and training as part of the team. Information sharing protocols in place between STAY and TWC mean that information flows easily between the organisations and HIOs drop in to Council offices on a regular basis to use facilities and build relationships with Council colleagues.

A protocol is in place with Connexions to ensure that each young person is linked to a Personal Advisor and vulnerable young people are assessed using the Common Assessment Framework and the most appropriate lead agency determined through 'Team around the Child' meetings.

This service has been in place for 3 years and the recognition that young people need a different approach if homelessness amongst this age group is to be tackled is key to its success.

For further information contact:

STAY Project Manager, Peter Ramshaw, 01952 618 868

Telford & Wrekin Council, Ginny Hickman, Homelessness Strategy Officer,
01952 202765

Working with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

Communities and Local Government is working in partnership with DfES to improve links between housing authorities and children's services and minimise the impact of homelessness on children and young people where this has resulted in the child's family or the young person living in temporary accommodation.

Communities and Local Government is planning to commission good practice guidance on housing and children's services co-operation in relation to homeless families with children and young people, to be published jointly with DfES. The guidance will detail ways housing and children's services can co-operate to address the accommodation and wider needs of 16/17 year old young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, presenting existing good practice.

The Social Exclusion Unit's report **Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs** (2005) notes that a young person applying for housing assistance is rarely assessed holistically and few housing departments see it as part of their role to signpost young people onto other help they may need that does not seem to relate directly to their housing need. It should increasingly be seen as good practice for housing departments to have a protocol for referring people on to other types of help and support which they might need. 43% of respondents to the SEU's 2005 Young Adults Questionnaire stated that the reason young people had first got in touch with services was due to housing need or homelessness.

The Audit Commission, in its report, **Youth Justice 2004: A Review of the Reformed Youth Justice System**, recommended that Government should set a joint target for local authorities (housing and children's services) for the provision of appropriate accommodation for young people under 18 years of age, and should invest in piloting small, supported units of accommodation for vulnerable young people.

Communities and Local Government is also working with DfES to ensure that the reforms set out in Youth Matters: Next Steps address the particular needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness – particularly in relation to targeted youth support.

Youth Matters (July 2005) addresses a range of key issues relating to teenagers. Building on the ambition of Every Child Matters, Youth Matters sets out a comprehensive package aimed at improving outcomes for all young people. This includes proposals for integrating Connexions Services with a wider range of young people's services at local authority level, and setting local targets for reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), which would be the focus of annual priorities conversations with the Department. Local authorities will be expected to ensure that the client tracking systems set up by Connexions services are maintained and developed to inform local planning and measurement of the NEET group. This is particularly important for young people who have experienced homelessness, who are more likely to be NEET.

Youth Justice and accommodation

Communities and Local Government is working closely with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) at the Home Office, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and others to develop effective solutions to prevent homelessness among offenders on community sentences and prisoners – including young offenders – at the end of their period in custody.

Providing suitable and sustainable accommodation for children and young people who have offended or are at risk of offending is critical to promoting:

- their own well-being;
- safe communities;
- reduced re-offending.

LOOKING FORWARD: THE YJB'S ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

In November 2006, YJB published *Suitable, Sustainable, Supported: A strategy to ensure provision of accommodation for children and young people who offend* (available from www.yjb.gov.uk). This is the result of a consultation with national, regional and local stakeholders, and identifies three key aims, which underpin all their work involving accommodation:

- increasing the influence of Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) on local housing strategies;
- helping to stop family breakdown, so that more young people can stay in their family homes where this is appropriate;
- ensuring young people in the youth justice system have access to suitable accommodation.

In order to achieve these aims, the strategy outlines how YJB will:

- champion the inclusion of local housing authorities on YOT management boards;
- seek to strengthen the influence of YOTs over local housing policies by developing local accommodation strategies;
- make the prevention of homelessness a core theme in YJB's prevention strategy;
- seek to make housing advice available to all young people in custody to assist with their resettlement;

- work with partners to ensure that: within three years, no young person is remanded to custody as a result of a lack of available accommodation; and within five years, the use of unsupported bed-and-breakfast accommodation is phased out.

Supporting People

The aim of the *Supporting People* (SP) programme is to enable vulnerable people (including young people) to maintain their accommodation or move to a more independent living situation. SP does this through paying for advice and support on matters such as settling into a new home and learning basic life skills that other people take for granted, like how to manage a household budget and cook.

The work done by foyers gives a good example of how SP can help vulnerable young people. Foyers provide accommodation and support for young people and help them make the transition into economic as well as social independence. They provide a package of advice ranging from help with Housing Benefit and resettlement into settled accommodation to help re-engaging with education, employment and training.

SP funding does not cover young people under the age of 16 as they would not be expected to be responsible for maintaining or holding their own accommodation or tenancies.

Data submitted by authorities has reported that over 19,000 young people were receiving housing related support on 31 March 2006, with nearly £141m of SP programme funding delivering this support in 2005/06.

Those young people supported include young people at risk², those leaving care and teenage parents. Also receiving housing related support (but not included in these figures) will be those young people receiving support for drug or alcohol problems, those being supported by services classified as being for 'single homeless people', those at risk of domestic violence or at risk of offending, young people with learning or physical disabilities and others within the SP programme.

2 The definition for "young people at risk" is: young people aged 16 – 25 who are homeless or in insecure accommodation, and those who are unable to take care of themselves or to protect themselves from harm or exploitation.

Case Study 5: Centrepont and Westminster City Council

Since 2004 Westminster City Council and Centrepont have been working together to put an end to the use of B&B for local 16 and 17 year olds. As a result, very few young people in Westminster are ever placed in B&B and those that are, stay only for a few days until a place at Centrepont Berwick Street becomes available.

465 young people were accommodated during 2005/06 in shared or single rooms at Berwick Street. The City Council now has first call on allocations for 10 of the 27 beds and Centrepont staff work closely with the young person's case worker and the Connexions Personal Adviser based at the Housing Options Service.

Prior to acceptance, each young person is interviewed, an assessment of risk is made, and whether the young person has recourse to public funds is established: of those who do have recourse, only one young person has been turned away since the scheme started.

Staff work with young people on practical, emotional and behavioural issues. This work may be very intensive with 20-25 young people considered to have a higher-than-average risk of suicide or significant self harm. In addition to this, young people are supported at the hostel by Centrepont's Health Team regarding their emotional or physical health needs, links with Brook for sexual health advice, and links with Connexions and to local colleges.

Each young person's stay at Berwick Street is limited to 28 days. During the nine months April 2006 - December 2006 over 330 young people departed, of whom approximately 30% regained sufficient stability to move on to less supported housing or to return home, and another 50% successfully completed the service's programme of support.

For further information contact:

Martin Wierzbicki, Housing Options, mwierzbicki@cwh.org.uk

Mary Blackwell, Centrepont Berwick Street, m.blackwell@centrepont.org

Health

Communities and Local Government is working with the Department of Health (DH) to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by the forthcoming DH Commissioning Framework for Health and Well-being.

Emerging findings of a recent study about 16/17 year olds who had been accepted as homeless, highlights the areas where health services need to be engaged in order to maximise health and well-being. Young people who have been accepted as homeless are already vulnerable. To provide for their needs, requires co-operation in the joint planning and delivery between health, social care, housing and voluntary sector agencies in order to be successful.

Health services need to ensure that suitably tailored primary care, sexual health, specialist mental health, such as those provided by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and drug and alcohol services are available and accessible to this group. It is vital that these services are not solely embedded in the support provided for those who experience homelessness but are also available to young people, before they reach this point and after they have been provided with settled housing. The provision of these accessible services can provide a vital function in homelessness prevention; tackling factors which can trigger homelessness or repeat homelessness; providing part of a supportive bridge between experiencing homelessness and being in settled accommodation.

Employment, benefits and learning

Communities and Local Government is working with the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus to improve access to benefits, training and employment for people who have experienced homelessness.

Communities and Local Government is sponsoring the “Transitional Spaces Project” (TSP) which has secured £2.1m over 3 years from the Invest to Save Budget. Off the Streets and into Work are leading a partnership including DWP, Jobcentre Plus and a range of voluntary sector agencies to implement the project, which is working with 100 individuals each year to help build their skills, gain sustainable employment, and move out of hostels and into private rented accommodation. As well as receiving employment support, individuals who participate in the scheme receive staged grants paid directly into their bank account which they can use towards the costs of moving into rented accommodation.

Communities and Local Government worked with DWP and Jobcentre Plus to develop the London Homeless Partnership which is providing benefits, training and employment advice to young people in London who are homeless or living in insecure accommodation and signposting them to other sources of support and services. Although based in Southwark, when fully developed LHP will operate on an outreach basis to key hostels and day centres, including a number of those being funded by the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme. It will also offer Jobcentre Plus services to customers who are homeless or living in insecure accommodation in other partner premises such as those offering vocational and motivational training. The aim is to ensure that this group receives a holistic package of support to help them move onto and through benefits and into independence and work.

Communities and Local Government continues to provide support for Business Action on Homelessness' programme of pre-employment training and work placements for people who are homeless or living in insecure accommodation, and has increased funding to £500,000 in 2006/07 to support increased activity in the regions.

The **Single Room Rent**, which limits housing benefit for young people aged under 25 to the average local rent for shared accommodation in the private sector, is often raised as an issue in relation to young people. Organisations working with young people have called for its abolition as they believe it puts vulnerable young people, including those who have experienced homelessness, at risk because it limits their access to appropriate accommodation. The Government is currently looking at this issue in the context of the Welfare Reform Bill.

New life skills qualifications for the homelessness sector, suitable for young people

Communities and Local Government has worked with the Learning and Skills Council to launch new accredited qualifications for staff working in the Homelessness Sector and for service users (the Learning Power award). The awards are suitable for some young people who are homeless or living in insecure accommodation. The awards complement the work taking place through the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme to bring older hostels up to modern accommodation standards, and deliver revamped services through motivated staff, to help more people move on from hostels and sustain independent living.

Emerging findings from the Communities and Local Government’s Survey of Families and 16/17 year olds accepted as homeless

Communities and Local Government has commissioned research on the causes, impacts and costs of homelessness in respect of 2,500 households, including 16/17 year olds, to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence homelessness and the impact of living in temporary accommodation³.

A literature review produced by academics at the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York drew the following conclusions about what is known from existing research about youth homelessness:

‘There are strong links between disrupted, negative or abusive experiences as a child and subsequent experience of youth homelessness. In addition, existing evidence suggests that a combination of wider socio-economic factors may play a role in the causation of youth homelessness, as young people who become homeless tend to be from socio-economically marginalised backgrounds, in the UK, EU and North America’.

The research commissioned by the Department, which is due to be published later this year, confirms the findings on vulnerability, with high proportions of the young people having had difficult childhood experiences (including parents with mental health problems, family breakdown, frequent moves, conflict with parents and step parents, violence within the home and sexual abuse). Additionally, behaviour associated with vulnerability and increased risks of homelessness, including taking drugs, drinking, involvement in crime and violence, were also more common amongst the 16/17 year olds accepted as homeless than amongst young people in the population as a whole. Many of the young people had also had previous involvement with statutory agencies either as a child or as a young person.

3 The research looks at the following topics for 16/17 year olds accepted as homeless

- Profile
- Personal history
- Reasons for and process of applying as homeless
- Relationship breakdown as a reason for homelessness
- Place applied from as homeless
- Process of applying as homeless
- Accommodation experiences since applying as homeless
- Health and social networks
- Support needs and service use
- Economic status, income, expenditure and debt

Subsequent to being accepted as homeless, 16/17 year olds tended to make significantly greater use of health and support services when in temporary accommodation than families accepted as homeless. They also had greater access to emotional and instrumental support since leaving their last settled home. However, once 16/17 year olds had been provided with settled accommodation, service-use tended to fall considerably. This raises the question of whether this reflected a reduction in need or whether young people find it difficult to access these services after having been provided with settled housing.

More detailed findings from the research will be reported in full in late spring 2007.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has commissioned Centrepoin and the Centre for Housing Policy at York University to undertake a major independent review of youth homelessness. The aim of the study is to make a critical assessment of the progress that has been made in alleviating youth homelessness across the UK in the last decade, with a view to recommending key priorities for future action. *Communities and Local Government* is assisting the research team with the provision of data and is represented on the project advisory group. The research is due to report in late 2007.

Conclusion

Working in partnership with local authorities and voluntary sector partners, the Government has made significant progress in tackling homelessness, including the investment of more than £400 million since 2002-03 to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Around £45 million in homelessness funding was provided to local authorities in 2005-06 and £66 million in 2006-07 to tackle homelessness. These grants form a key part of *Communities and Local Government's* strategy for tackling homelessness and halving the use of temporary accommodation by 2010. To mark the 40th anniversary of *Cathy Come Home* the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly, announced an £8 million increase in the grant allocation for local authorities and the voluntary sector, bringing the total amount to £74 million for 2007/08. As she set out, this increase will both assist local authorities with their continuing prevention agenda and also enable them to look at other measures to further prevent and tackle homelessness, with real emphasis on vulnerable young people.

The total number of households placed in temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation by local housing authorities in England fell by 8% between September 2005 and September 2006, confirming a steady downward trend. Further work with our key stakeholders will be critical to building on this progress as we work towards our targets of reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010, and ending the use of B&B accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds, except in an emergency, by 2010.

We will also continue to work proactively with local authorities to provide advice and support, for instance through the work of our new specialist adviser on youth homelessness and the new national youth homelessness scheme.

We welcome feedback on the usefulness of this and other briefings, as well as any suggestions for future titles. Comments or questions should be sent via email to tacklinghomelessness@communities.gsi.gov.uk or by post to:

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Further information on the Department's work to tackle and prevent homelessness can be found on our website at www.communities.gov.uk