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## **Youth homelessness in the UK**

### **A decade of progress?**

*Deborah Quilgars, Sarah Johnsen and Nicholas Pleace*

### **An evaluation of the progress being made to address youth homelessness in the UK.**

There have been significant policy developments across the UK to address youth homelessness in recent years, most particularly the extension of priority need groups and a new emphasis on the prevention of homelessness. This study, the first UK-wide review of youth homelessness for a decade, explores whether these changes have been effective and recommends key priorities for future action.

In particular, it explores:

- the scale of youth homelessness;
- the profile and nature of youth homelessness, and whether it has changed over time;
- young people's experiences of homelessness;
- service provision for young homeless people;
- joint working in addressing youth homelessness;
- the impact of policy and practice developments on outcomes for homeless young people and those at risk of homelessness;
- the implications for future policy and practice priorities in addressing youth homelessness.



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**A decade of progress?**

**Deborah Quilgars, Sarah Johnsen and  
Nicholas Pleace**



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# Preface

Just over a decade ago the ‘Inquiry into Preventing Youth Homelessness’ was set up by ten housing and youth charities to examine the scale, nature and possible solutions to youth homelessness. The first study of its kind it provided us with an insight into the significant problem of youth homelessness at that time and identified the action needed to address it. Not only did it draw attention to the vast numbers of young people affected by homelessness, but highlighted the social and economic factors that contributed to their situation, including unemployment, low wages, reduced benefit rates, a shortage of affordable housing and limited access to public housing.

This new review, carried out by the Centre for Housing Policy at York University and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, provides us with an opportunity to develop a national picture of the nature and extent of youth homelessness today.

The last ten years has seen a new focus on reducing youth homelessness. However, 16–24 year olds are still one of the largest groups recorded as statutory homeless and nearly half of those who are classified as living in ‘non-statutory homeless households’. Therefore it is important to understand and build on what has been successful and change what hasn’t worked, focusing our sights on the ultimate goal – that no young person should become homeless.

Accessing affordable and appropriate housing remains an acute problem for young people. There is a mismatch between young people’s income and housing costs. A rise in the number of single households, changes in family structure, an ageing population and high house prices have put access to private and social housing out of reach for many. A shortage of social housing necessitates often very lengthy stays in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

Young people still cite the inability or unwillingness of parents, friends and relatives to provide accommodation as the primary reason for homelessness. A stable home life is built on support received from family and friends and without this young people lack the support and encouragement they need to engage and succeed. Family and friends are crucial in the prevention of youth homelessness. Yet family mediation practice varies considerably across the country.

Housing itself is not sustainable unless young people have the life skills and support they need, both emotional and financial, to live independently. While there have been advances made in supporting young people in education, employment and training,



there is a discord between the goals of employability initiatives and the welfare benefit system, which can severely impede young people's participation.

Young people report that homelessness can lead to them having to leave their job or place of education. This in turn means they are also at risk of experiencing many other problems, including isolation and social exclusion. Too many young people report feeling confused, misunderstood and powerless when navigating the homelessness system. Ultimately, we need the government to listen to young people and address the barriers they continue to tell us prevent them from having a home and thus a future.

All of these things are important if young people are to put down the roots they need in safe and secure communities where they can build networks and relationships, gain a sense of cultural identity and where appropriate reintegrate into their families. Having a home is necessary for young people to access services, to take an active part in communities and contribute to wider society. In short, to be *homeful* not homeless.

As Chief Executive of Centrepont I commend this excellent report to you. It encompasses qualitative and quantitative data and most importantly the voices and experiences of policy and practice experts and young people themselves. I trust that the data and findings will be fully used by service providers and all tiers of government to benefit homeless young people and the communities in which they must find a home. Given the reduction in homelessness over the last ten years, reducing the risk and ending youth homelessness is an achievable goal over the next decade.



Anthony Lawton  
Chief Executive  
Centrepont

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Deborah Quilgars, Sarah Johnsen and Nicholas Pleace, Centre for Housing Policy, University of York.

Balbir Chatrik, Johanna Holmes and Caroline Day, Centrepoint.

# Executive summary

This study is the first UK-wide review of youth homelessness for a decade. Supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the review was conducted by the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, in partnership with Centrepoint.

It follows significant policy developments across the UK in the last decade to address youth homelessness. The introduction of homelessness strategies has placed a new emphasis on prevention, paying explicit attention to young people. Statutory protection has also been strengthened with the extension of priority need categories (particularly 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers aged 18–20) under the homelessness legislation in England, Wales and Scotland (with Northern Ireland soon to follow).

The review involved the analysis of statistics and literature, and six detailed case studies (Belfast, Edinburgh, Lambeth, Leicester, Sedgefield and Swansea) including interviews and focus groups with a total of 148 young people (including those with and without children) and 121 agency representatives. National policy consultations were also undertaken with young people and key experts.

## The scale of youth homelessness

Existing data on youth homelessness has significant limitations – in particular, it is only possible to count young people who are in contact with services. On this basis, it can be estimated that at least 75,000 young people experienced homelessness in the UK in 2006–07. This included 43,075 young people (aged 16–24) who were accepted as statutorily homeless in the UK (8,337 young people accepted as priority need because they were aged 16 or 17 years). In addition, at least 31,000 non-statutorily homeless young people used Supporting People services during 2006–07.

The overall numbers of young people accepted as homeless across the UK increased following the extension of priority need groups in the early 2000s. However, levels have fallen in the last few years. At a country level, numbers have reduced in England and Wales, but have remained similar in Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is difficult to assess trends before this time, as definitions changed.

The annual rate of young people aged 16–24 accepted as homeless is highest in Scotland (15.1 young people per 1,000 young people in population), followed by Wales (8.2) and England (4.9) and Northern Ireland (4.8). There are also significant regional and urban/rural differences within each country.

The numbers of young homeless people sleeping rough in the UK on any given night are low. However, qualitative evidence indicates that young homeless people experience rough sleeping before securing temporary accommodation. Limited data also suggests that considerably more young people may sleep rough over the course of a year than on any given night.

Young women are more likely to be statutorily homeless than young men, while young men (aged 18 or over) are more likely to be non-statutorily homeless. Statutorily homeless young people are very unlikely to have a minority ethnic background in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, but are significantly over-represented in England, most particularly London. Young homeless people may be single, part of a couple and/or have dependent children.

### **The experience of homelessness**

Young people who have experienced disruption or trauma during childhood and/or who are from poor socio-economic backgrounds are at increased risk of homelessness. The main 'trigger' for homelessness among young people is relationship breakdown (usually with parents or step-parents). For many, this is a consequence of long-term conflict within the home and often involves violence.

Young homeless people have much poorer health than other young people. Depression and other mental health problems are prevalent, as are substance misuse issues. A significant minority of young homeless people have multiple needs. It is not clear whether the prevalence of complex needs is on the increase or whether agencies are now better at recognising a range of needs.

Homelessness compounds a number of the problems faced by young people. This is particularly evident with mental health problems and/or the onset (or exacerbation of existing) substance misuse problems. There is particularly strong evidence that homelessness impedes young people's participation in employment, education or training, with many becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) after leaving their last settled home.

Other impacts are more mixed. For some young people, social networks are fractured, but many gain support from new sources (particularly support workers). Homelessness can be associated with experiences of violence and/or involvement in 'risky behaviour', but may also lead to increased feelings of safety and an overall improvement in quality of life. There was often a complexity in people's experiences, whereby both negative and positive impacts were experienced by young homeless people.

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

In response to the preventative agenda, there has been a significant cultural shift in the way that local authorities and support providers are responding to youth homelessness. There was an increasing consensus that being accepted as statutorily homeless should not be the 'inevitable' and was not always the 'best' outcome for young people. A housing options approach dominated assessments of housing need and, while there were some concerns about gatekeeping, most felt that new practices had improved service delivery.

However, young people continued to find the experience of homelessness assessment intimidating, and commonly reported feeling confused, misunderstood and/or powerless when navigating the homelessness 'system'. Both agencies and young people called for more widespread provision of dedicated housing officers for young people.

The provision of preventative services – particularly family mediation – had expanded significantly in recent years. Family mediation practice varied considerably, with tensions evident between some statutory agencies and mediation practitioners as to the role of the service. Agencies and young people identified significant scope for further development of earlier 'pre-crisis' interventions, including parenting initiatives.

A range of models of accommodation for young people existed in most urban areas. Overall, there was a lack of clarity as to whether this accommodation should be 'temporary', moving on young people as soon as possible, or more deliberately 'transitional', providing an opportunity to improve later housing trajectories. Moves between accommodation settings were common; sometimes these were planned to access a more appropriate placement but moves were often crisis- or supply-driven and increased instability in young people's lives. Some young people spoke of being caught in a 'homeless circuit' for months or years.

Shortages of social housing were acute in many areas, necessitating often very lengthy stays in temporary accommodation, which, in turn, commonly had a negative effect on young people's motivation and psychological well-being. Support providers were increasingly developing strategies to facilitate young people's access to the private rented sector, but identified a number of barriers to, and concerns about, doing so (most especially the creation of a 'poverty trap' and/or long-term benefit dependency). Rent deposit/guarantee schemes were not always accessible to young people.

The recent push for the expansion of supported lodgings provision was largely welcomed by agencies, although the idea had a more mixed reception from young people.

Floating support schemes were well established and appeared successful in improving tenancy sustainment. Providers were increasingly seeking to complement these by (re)building young people's social support networks (promoting mentoring and befriending schemes in particular).

Availability of treatment for diagnosable mental health problems was said to have improved, but gaps remained for young people with 'low-level' mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. Provision for substance misuse had also improved, but had not evolved in concert with young people's changing drug-use patterns, as little treatment was available for young people dependent on cannabis and/or alcohol.

Similarly, provision supporting young people into education, employment and training had improved significantly, but major barriers – caused by a discord between the goals of employability initiatives and the welfare benefit system – severely impeded young people's economic participation.

While there were some evaluations of services, overall there remained significant gaps in the evidence base of 'what worked well' for young homeless people. The success of all forms of provision was widely agreed to depend to a significant degree on the quality of individual project staff and their relationship with young people.

### **Joint working in addressing youth homelessness**

The development of homelessness strategies had been a crucial factor in addressing youth homelessness. Effective links between the homelessness strategy and both

Supporting People Plans and Children's and Young People Plans was highlighted in most case studies, although this had been achieved to differing extents.

Operational joint working between service providers was seen to have made some significant steps forward in the last five years. Factors contributing to this included: policy and legislative change; specific dedicated and/or seconded staff posts; youth homelessness forums; and joint protocols. However, challenges still existed in inter-agency working, often arising from resource constraints and a lack of understanding regarding different organisations' roles.

All case studies had developed, or were developing, joint protocols to ensure that agencies worked together more effectively to deliver housing and other support services to young homeless people. These appeared to be useful tools, although they had limited applicability to non-priority need groups of young people.

The monitoring of initiatives was improving at both the national and local level, though the development of more appropriate measures for preventative work, and the incorporation of both soft and hard outcomes into measures, were seen as future priorities.

Case study respondents differed in their assessment as to whether central funding was adequate. Respondents made a plea for longer-term funding of initiatives. The recently introduced three-year local area agreements (LAAs) between central and local government (and its partners) were seen as a good opportunity to influence priorities in future homelessness service delivery.

## **Overall assessment of progress**

Within all four countries, there was a widespread consensus among agency representatives that policy on homelessness generally, and youth homelessness specifically, was moving in the right direction. Young people, however, did not concur with this view because of the challenges they faced with finding housing at a local level.

There was a call from all quarters to take the prevention agenda further by recognising that conflict in the home may predate the young person leaving by many years. New initiatives, such as Targeted Youth Support, were welcomed for their focus on joint working and consideration of the full range of risks to young people's well-being.



There was a concern that the homelessness system was operating as *the only route* to housing for less well-off and particularly vulnerable young people. It was argued that effective prevention needed to include the creation of affordable housing pathways for young people.

While floating support was widely available, agencies and young people reported a shortage of high-quality temporary accommodation for young people. Even short periods of rough sleeping and stays in bed and breakfast accommodation were still felt to be too common. New limits on bed and breakfast use in Wales and Northern Ireland (with England to follow) were welcomed, but more emergency accommodation was still felt to be needed.

The review concluded that there is a need for an improved evidence base on 'what works' in addressing youth homelessness, including an evaluation of supported lodgings schemes in particular.

The review confirmed that income poverty and worklessness are associated with homelessness, with evidence that homelessness leads to increased proportions of young people being NEET. Young people found it difficult to study or work with present (hostel and private sector) rent levels together with Housing Benefit restrictions and problematic administration. The reform of the 16-hour rule for claiming Housing Benefit when studying and living in hostels would represent a first step in addressing these problems.

Some groups of young people appear to have benefited to a greater extent than others from recent policy change. There was evidence of a much more effective and co-ordinated response to meet the needs of young people aged 16 and 17, and those looked after by the local authority (again, particularly in the younger age group). Those aged between 18 and 24 were regarded to be in a comparatively worse position. In addition, young people received very different service responses depending on whether or not they had dependent children. Services could usefully develop policies to support better youth transitions across housing, employment and family formation.

# 1 Background to the review

Just over a decade ago the first-ever Inquiry into Preventing Youth Homelessness was set up by ten housing and youth charities to examine the scale, nature and possible solutions to youth homelessness (Evans, 1996). The inquiry was established in response to widespread concern at the substantial increases in youth homelessness in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It succeeded in demonstrating that youth homelessness was a very significant social problem throughout the UK and that widespread action was required to address it. The present review represents the first attempt since the inquiry to evaluate the progress being made on addressing youth homelessness across Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. This first chapter outlines the considerable policy change that has occurred in the last ten years and introduces the proposed scope and methods of the review.

## A decade of policy and legislative change

In the last decade, there have been very significant policy developments across the UK to address homelessness generally and, within this, youth homelessness. With devolution, each country has adopted its own policies with different emphases. Nonetheless, there have been a number of key commonalities – in particular, a greater emphasis on strategy and co-ordination, and a strengthening of the homelessness legislation.

The introduction of homelessness strategies in all countries<sup>1</sup> (including national strategies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) gave local authorities a much stronger steer with respect to the development of homelessness policies and practices. In particular, a new emphasis was placed on the prevention of homelessness. Local authorities have been strongly encouraged to develop a full range of earlier interventions, including housing advice services, rent deposit guarantee schemes, mediation services, tenancy sustainment, and new initiatives for ex-offenders and those experiencing domestic violence (Pawson *et al.*, 2006, 2007).

From the outset, this preventative focus has had a particularly strong focus on young people, particularly in the English context. Pilot preventative schemes have included Safe in the City and Safe Moves (Nistala and Dane, 2000; Safe in the City, 2002; Quilgars *et al.*, 2004). A new National Youth Homelessness Scheme (NYHS) was launched in England in 2007, led by the YMCA and Centrepoint. This comprised a package of measures to reduce and prevent youth homelessness, including

development of a network of supported lodgings schemes, a committee of formerly homeless young people to advise ministers on policy, a new national homelessness advice service and the establishment of regional centres of excellence. Furthermore, there is now a universal expectation that mediation schemes will be available for all young people (CLG, 2007a).

In Wales, a national review of youth homelessness was recently completed (WAG, 2007), which called for consistent provision for young people across the country, and for an early intervention pathways approach and mediation services in all local authorities. There is also a commitment to develop a regional pilot of supported lodgings in Northern Ireland to meet the needs of care leavers and other homeless young people (DSD, 2007). In Scotland, the prevention of homelessness has been a key concern across homelessness policy since the Homelessness Task Force was set up by the (then) Scottish Executive in 1999 (Scottish Executive, 2002).

The second key development in addressing youth homelessness has been the strengthening of the statutory 'safety net' in recent years. In all four countries, certain categories of young people were accepted under the existing homelessness legislation by virtue of their priority status, specifically young families and those assessed as 'vulnerable', as well as young people deemed to be 'at risk' in certain circumstances.<sup>2</sup> However, the early 2000s saw the priority need categories significantly extended, most particularly by adding all 16–17 year olds to the 'priority need' groups in separate Acts in England, Wales and Scotland.<sup>3</sup> This is also expected to happen soon in Northern Ireland (DSD, 2007).

In addition, England, Wales and Scotland now define care leavers aged between 18 and 20 as being in priority need.<sup>4</sup> In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, young people who are at risk of financial or sexual exploitation are also described as a priority need group by guidance to legislation. However, while Wales defines this group as also being 18–20, neither Northern Ireland nor Scotland sets a specific age limit. Further, Scotland also includes those aged 18–20 who are involved in substance misuse as a priority need group.

Some changes to young people's access to temporary accommodation have also occurred recently. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 extended rights to temporary accommodation to all single (non-priority) homeless people for the first time. From 2012, Scotland will also abolish priority need categories, effectively giving all homeless people, including young people, the right to permanent rehousing.<sup>5</sup> In Wales, a recent limit has been placed on bed and breakfast (B&B) use for certain groups, including 16 and 17 year olds, to between two and six weeks.<sup>6</sup> England also has a target to reduce B&B use to emergency situations for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010.

A significant number of other policy changes and initiatives have influenced the type and availability of support for young homeless people. Constraints of space dictate that a detailed account of each cannot be provided here, but the most influential changes are summarised briefly below.

The Supporting People programme, introduced in all four countries in 2003, focused attention on the role of support services for young homeless people across the UK. The programme funds housing-related support services for vulnerable client groups, including 'young people at risk' as well as homeless people more generally. A new strategy for Supporting People in England (CLG, 2007b) emphasises user-focused models of support including individually held budgets as well as a greater attention to outcomes.

Throughout the UK, the well-being of children and young people has been promoted as a key priority underpinning service delivery at all levels. The Every Child Matters framework, and introduction of Children Trust arrangements, have been influential in enhancing well-being across a range of indicators. Children Commissioners have been established in each country (termed Children and Young People Commissioners in Scotland and Northern Ireland). Most recently, particularly in England, there has been a new emphasis placed on the role of parenting and an encouragement for services to 'think family' (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2008). The *Youth Matters* Green Paper (DfES, 2005) has also led to a ten-year strategy on positive activities for young people (HM Treasury, 2007a) and a commitment to the development of targeted youth support services across England in 2008 (DfES, 2007a). Finally, a Children's Plan has been launched in England (DCSF, 2008).

Following extensive evidence of the over-representation of care leavers in the young homeless population (Anderson *et al.*, 1993; Evans, 1996; Biehal and Wade, 1999), leaving care acts have extended the duty of social services to provide care leavers with accommodation until the age of 18 in Scotland, England and Wales, and Northern Ireland.<sup>7</sup> In addition, improved pathway planning procedures are in place for those leaving care, usually until they are aged 21 (or 24 if in education). Recently, *Care Matters* in England (DfES, 2007b) and Northern Ireland (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2007) has proposed further strengthening of the corporate parenting role.

A number of strategies have prompted greater consideration of the housing circumstances and needs of young offenders, including those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness (e.g. WAG and Youth Justice Board, 2004; Youth Justice Board, 2006, 2007; DSD, 2007).

More generally, homelessness has been recognised increasingly as a manifestation of wider forms of social exclusion that individuals or households experience as a result of income poverty and/or a range of personal or social circumstances (Scottish Executive, 2002; ODPM, 2005; Cabinet Office, 2006; DSD, 2007). As a result, joint working at both governmental and local levels has been promoted to enable more integrated responses to homelessness. A number of specific initiatives have also been launched, for example, the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) pilots in England.

Running alongside (and to some extent underpinning) these initiatives has been an increasing recognition of the particular constraints faced by young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, in making the transition to adulthood. It is generally acknowledged that the socio-economic foundations of independent housing for young people (as well as broader transitions to work and household formation) started to fracture in the 1980s (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). It is assumed that housing transitions have continued to lengthen for young people and that extended financial support from parents is increasingly required to facilitate independent moves (Social Exclusion Unit, 2005). It has also been recognised that young adults with complex needs experience more difficult or 'disordered' transitions (Social Exclusion Unit, 2005; Cabinet Office, 2006). While unemployment rates among young people have fallen over the last ten years, a small but significant proportion of young people continue to experience a situation of being not in employment, education or training (NEET). More generally, social mobility for the most disadvantaged young people has declined (Margo and Dixon, 2006).

Specifically in terms of housing, Ford *et al.* (2002) identified five main pathways into housing for young people, defined by the interaction of three main factors: the ability to plan; the nature of constraints to housing; and the degree of family support available. Notably, young homeless people were most likely to experience a 'chaotic pathway' where there was an absence of planning, limited family support and substantial constraints on access to housing. Importantly, different meanings were also attached to tenure by young people – for example, the private sector was seen as a more acceptable stepping stone for those with a planned pathway, but less so for those with a chaotic pathway where it might be housing of last or only resort. Finally, the research showed that, while some young people shifted from one pathway to the next, they rarely were able to move from difficult to easier pathways.

## The review

This review was commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and undertaken by a partnership between Centrepoin and the Centre for Housing Policy (University of York). Three other leading homelessness agencies also supported the research: NCH, Crisis and Homeless Link.

The overall aim of the review was to evaluate progress in alleviating youth homelessness across the UK, with a view to recommending key priorities for future action. While significant research has been conducted on youth homelessness in the past decade (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2000 and subsequent annual updates), there has been no attempt to develop an overall national picture of its nature and extent since 1996. This review seeks to fill this gap.

The review addressed four key questions.

- What patterns can be discerned in the scale of youth homelessness over the past ten years?
- What do we know of the profile and nature of youth homelessness? Has this changed over time?
- What impact have policy and practice developments – in particular local homelessness strategies and preventative interventions – had on outcomes for homeless young people and those at risk of homelessness?
- What are the implications for future policy and practice priorities in addressing youth homelessness?

The review has involved three key elements (which are described in more detail in Appendix 1).

1. A desk-based review of evidence on the scale, nature and trends in youth homelessness across the UK, involving:
  - a comprehensive review of published literature on youth homelessness over the last decade;
  - a review of available statistical sources, including statutory homelessness statistics in the four nations;
  - re-analysis of results from a survey of statutorily homeless families and 16 and 17 year olds commissioned by Communities and Local Government (Pleace *et al.*, 2008), referred to as the 'CLG survey' in this report.



2. Six detailed local authority case studies: one in each of Wales (Swansea), Scotland (Edinburgh) and Northern Ireland (Belfast), and three in England (Lambeth, Leicester and Sedgefield). In each, representatives of key agencies were interviewed and focus groups with homeless young people conducted (involving 269 individuals in total). Relevant local statistics and literature were also examined. A profile of each case study area is provided in Appendix 2.
3. National consultation exercises with 22 policy/practice experts and 17 young people were also conducted. As part of the youth consultation, young people mapped out their homelessness 'journeys' – six of these journeys are included in the report to illustrate the nature of pathways through homelessness.

The study investigates the experiences of all young homeless people aged 16–24 (inclusive). Importantly, the report covers single people, couples and homeless families within this age group.

It is possible to debate what actually constitutes 'homelessness' (see Carlen, 1996). This study utilised a broad definition, to include young people sleeping rough, living in hostels, on friends' sofas/floors and in self-contained but temporary housing, as well as those in semi-permanent situations who may be *at risk* of homelessness in the future.

Nonetheless, much of the report will consider two key categories of young people, defined by legislative distinctions and the criteria commonly used by central and local government, the voluntary sector and social landlords.

1. *Statutorily homeless young people*: young people accepted as being 'in priority need' under the homelessness legislation, most specifically:
  - 16 and 17 year olds: statutorily homeless and in priority need because of their age (except in Northern Ireland);
  - young families: statutorily homeless families headed by someone aged between 16 and 24 years.
  - In addition, there are other more specific 'priority need' groups, including care leavers aged 18–20 (see section above). Authorities also have discretion to accept any person who they consider 'vulnerable' in some way (and therefore less able to fend for themselves than other homeless people) – for example, because of a physical disability or mental health problems.
2. *Non-statutorily (or 'single') homeless young people*: young people defined as being 'homeless' by housing associations and other voluntary or charitable sector service providers, but who have not been found statutorily homeless. This group

would include people sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation who have not been placed there by the local authority.

It must be noted that different housing associations and voluntary sector agencies use their own assessment criteria when they define a young person as 'homeless', so the latter category is somewhat ambiguous. There is also long-standing evidence of local authorities interpreting homelessness legislation differently from one another in defining statutory homelessness (Anderson and Morgan, 1997). Lastly, but importantly, young people will also have their own assessment as to whether or not they are homeless and this may not accord with formal assessments.

## **Report outline**

Chapter 2 assesses the present scale of youth homelessness and reviews trends in available data over the last decade. The third chapter examines the nature of youth homelessness, focusing particularly on the characteristics of young homeless people and their pathways into homelessness, and it also documents the impacts of homelessness on young people. Chapter 4 reviews the range and effectiveness of service responses to address the housing and support needs of young people. The fifth chapter assesses joint working and strategic approaches to youth homelessness. The report concludes, in Chapter 6, with an evaluation of the progress made in alleviating youth homelessness in the UK, and identifies opportunities for future developments in this area.



## 2 The scale and patterns of youth homelessness

### Key points

- The existing data has significant limitations. However, it can be estimated that at least 75,000 16–24 year-olds experienced homelessness in the UK in 2006–07. The largest group are young people who are found statutorily homeless.
- Youth homelessness is traditionally thought of as involving lone teenagers and young people in their early 20s. While this group remains significant, many young people who are found statutorily homeless have dependent children of their own, particularly those in the 18–24 age range.
- There have been increases in young people accepted as statutorily homeless linked to the widening of priority needs groups, but, in the last two years in England, levels have fallen sharply. This is linked to the widespread adoption of preventative services.
- The numbers of young homeless people sleeping rough in the UK on any given night are low. However, there is evidence that some young homeless people experience short periods of sleeping rough, suggesting that higher numbers experience sleeping rough over the course of a year.
- Scotland and many urban areas of the UK tend to report higher overall numbers of statutorily homeless young people. They also report higher rates of non-statutory homelessness.
- Young women are more likely to be statutorily homeless than young men. Although data is poor, it indicates that young men are more likely than women to be non-statutorily homeless among the 18 and over group.
- Minority ethnic households are significantly over-represented among homeless people in England, particularly among black British and mixed households, and particularly in London. Homeless people are unlikely to be from minority ethnic backgrounds in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

## Introduction

This chapter examines the available statistical evidence on the scale and patterns of youth homelessness in the UK. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of some of the difficulties in measuring youth homelessness. Evidence is then presented in four main areas:

- the annual level of youth homelessness, including both statutory and non-statutory youth homelessness and the rates at which these occur in the UK;
- the level of youth homelessness at one point in time;
- changes in the levels of youth homelessness over the last decade;
- the demographic characteristics of young homeless people.

## Measuring youth homelessness

There are six main problems that arise in trying to count young homeless people in the UK:

- definitions vary;
- the data collected varies between agencies;
- the data is restricted in scope;
- there is little or no robust data on some populations;
- some of the available data sets overlap, i.e. a young person may be recorded in more than one set of data;
- what data there is tends to be based entirely on service contact.

The data sources used for this chapter are described in Appendix 1.

There is considerable research evidence that many young homeless people spend periods 'sofa-surfing' between friends and relatives before they eventually approach (and are then counted by) services (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Pleace *et al.*, 2008). However,

hidden homelessness is almost impossible to measure and was therefore not included in the estimates for this study. Rather, more robust estimates have been generated for two key groups:

- young statutorily homeless households who have been found unintentionally homeless and in priority need;
- non-statutorily homeless young people using hostels or supported accommodation, or sleeping rough.

## Annual levels of youth homelessness

### The numbers of young people experiencing statutory homelessness over the course of one year

Table 1 shows that 8,337 young people were accepted as homeless because they were a 16–17 year old during 2006–07 (and 10,424 in 2005–06).

**Table 1 Annual numbers of young people aged 16–17 accepted as statutorily homeless (unintentionally homeless and in priority need) (United Kingdom)**

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland*	United Kingdom
2005–06	7,444	2,136	681	163	10,424
2006–07	5,652	1,871	686	128	8,337
Total 2005–07	13,096	4,007	1,367	291	18,761

\* 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.

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

Table 2 shows the annual numbers of young people accepted because they were care leavers or at risk of exploitation in England, Scotland and Wales (2,046 in 2006–07). The broader criteria that can place 18–20 year olds in priority need in Scotland are reflected in higher annual numbers of acceptances than are found in England or Wales.

**Table 2 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)**

	England*	Scotland**	Wales***	Great Britain
2005–06	901	1,125	170	2,196
2006–07	732	1,172	142	2,046
Total	1,633	2,297	312	4,242

\* Care leavers aged 18–20 only.

\*\* Aged 18+.

\*\*\* Aged 18–20 only.

No equivalent data was available for Northern Ireland because it does not have equivalent priority need groups.

Source: Reported and Grossed P1E Statistics (England), HL1 statistics (Scotland), WHO-12 statistics (Wales). Data for England refers to primary category for acceptance only.

Table 3 shows that 43,075 households headed by a young person aged 16–24 were found statutorily homeless in 2006–07, regardless of their reason for acceptance as homeless. This figure clearly exceeds Tables 1 and 2 as it includes young people accepted because they were 16–17 year olds, care leavers or ‘at risk’, alongside young people accepted because they had dependent children of their own, or because they were in priority need because a care or support need made them ‘vulnerable’ (see Chapter 1). For example, only 6,384 of the 29,937 households (21 per cent) in England were accepted because the applicant was 16–17 years old or an 18–20-year-old care leaver. Since the criteria for acceptance in the different countries vary in their details, Table 3 figures are not an exact comparison.

**Table 3 Annual numbers of statutorily homeless households (unintentionally homeless and in priority need) in which the applicant was a young person\* (United Kingdom)**

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland*	United Kingdom
2005–06	36,765	9,447	3,203	1,052	49,415
2006–07	29,937	9,132	2,927	1,079	43,075
Total	66,602	18,579	6,130	2,131	93,542

\* Figures are for 16–24 year olds for England, Wales and Scotland, but are for 16–25 year olds for Northern Ireland.

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

Map 1 shows the distribution of statutorily homeless households headed by 16–24 year olds accepted during the course of 2006–07 for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As can be seen, statutorily homeless households headed by 16–24 year olds were accepted in the greatest numbers in urban areas and within Scotland. These findings are accounted for by the greater population concentrations in urban centres and by the wider priority needs categories in operation in Scotland. They possibly also reflect the greater emphasis on prevention within England (Pawson, 2007).

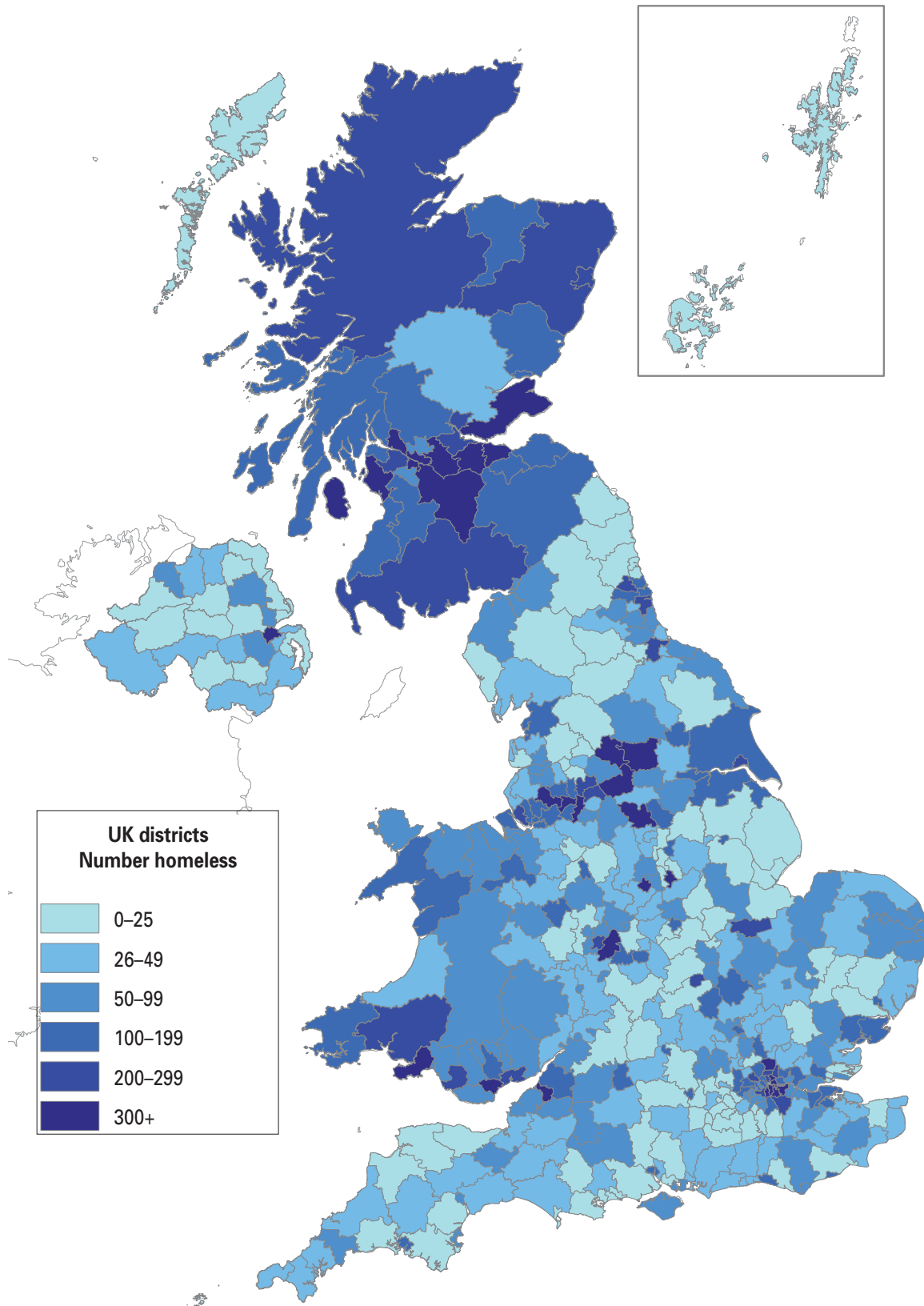
Particularly high levels of acceptances (300 plus) occurred in the central belt of Scotland (the Glasgow/Edinburgh corridor), the Leeds/Bradford conurbation, Greater Manchester, Wigan, Nottingham, Birmingham, Bristol, Swansea, Cardiff and in the London boroughs of Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets, and in Belfast (Map 1).

Lower levels were found in the rural areas of the North of England, the Home Counties and the South West of England. Other than the Scottish islands, authorities in Scotland and Wales tended to report higher numbers of statutorily homeless young people than England. Rural areas of Northern Ireland tended to mirror rural England, with lower numbers of young people being accepted as homeless.

### **The number of young people experiencing statutory homelessness over the course of one year relative to population**

Table 4 shows the rate at which young people aged 16–17 and 16–24 were accepted as homeless based on mid-2006 ONS<sup>1</sup> population projections and 2006–07 acceptances. The higher rate of acceptances in Scotland for 16–17 year olds is immediately evident, as is the somewhat higher level in Wales. Table 4 shows there were similar rates of acceptances among 16–24 year olds.

Map 1 Statutory youth homelessness by district



**Table 4 Annual statutory youth homelessness during 2006–07 relative to mid-2006 estimates of total populations of young people (United Kingdom)**

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland*	United Kingdom
Acceptances 16–17 year olds	5,652	1,871	686	182	8,391
Population	1,322,800	128,400	79,700	51,900	1,582,800
Rate per thousand	4.27	14.57	8.6	3.5	5.3
Acceptances of young people aged 16–24 years	29,937	9,132	2,927	1,079	43,075
Population	6,028,800	602,100	358,100	254,700	7,243,700
Rate per thousand	4.9	15.1	8.2	4.8	5.7

\* Figures are for 16–24 year olds for England, Wales and Scotland, but are for 16–25 year olds for Northern Ireland.

Source: Reported and Grossed P1E Statistics (England), HL1 statistics (Scotland), WHO-12 statistics (Wales), Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Office for National Statistics mid-2006 population estimates for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

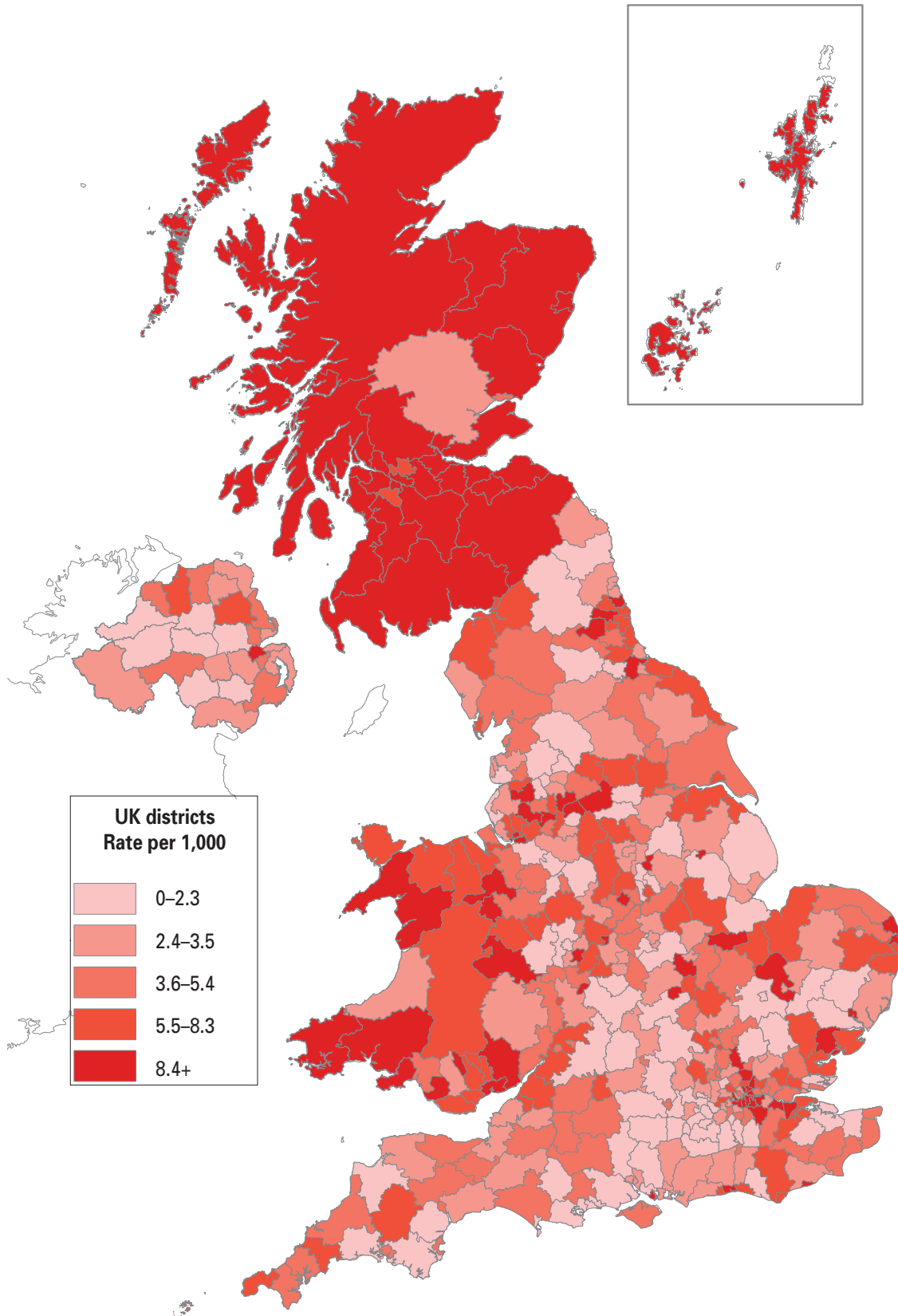
Map 2 shows an estimated rate of prevalence of statutory youth homelessness among 16–24 year olds for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, dividing authorities in the UK into quintiles (five equal groups). Areas shown as ‘0–2.3’ are those in the lowest quintile, in which the equivalent of up to 2.3 young people in every 1,000 in the age range 16–24 had been accepted as statutorily homeless. By contrast, in areas in the highest quintile ‘8.4+’, the equivalent of at least 8.4 young people in every 1,000 aged 16–24 had been accepted as statutorily homeless.

As can be seen, prevalence rates for statutorily homelessness among young people were highest in Scotland (Map 2), including Orkney and Shetland. While this almost certainly reflects the wider definitions of priority need in Scotland, it may also reflect higher levels of need, though this cannot be established for certain.

In England, authorities with the highest rates of acceptances included 12 of the 32 London boroughs, Sheffield, Kirklees, Wigan (which also had high overall numbers), several authorities in Tyneside and a few coastal towns, including Hastings. Within Wales, Swansea, Cardiff, much of the South Coast and Gwynedd were all prominent. The highest rates of homelessness in Northern Ireland were in Belfast, Ballymena and Derry.

The economically prosperous Home Counties seemed the least likely to have high rates of statutory homelessness among young people and rates in parts of the South West were also quite low, as were rural areas within Northern Ireland.

Map 2 Rate per 1,000 population by district





## Annual levels of non-statutory youth homelessness

There are three main sources of information on non-statutory youth homelessness (see Appendix 1):

- Supporting People Client Record information;
- housing associations' CORE or SCORE returns;<sup>2</sup>
- rough sleeping counts and surveys.

### Non-statutorily homeless young people using Supporting People services

Just under one-quarter of people using Supporting People services in England were classified as within one of the three 'homelessness' client groups,<sup>3</sup> but not as 'statutorily homeless' during 2005–06. These 48,000 people recorded within the Supporting People Client Record were therefore within the group usually classified as 'non-statutorily homeless households' (see Chapter 1).<sup>4</sup>

CHP analysis of the 2005–06 data on the *use* of Supporting People services<sup>5</sup> shows that 14 per cent of non-statutorily homeless service users were 16–17 year-olds and that almost one-half (46 per cent) were aged 16–24.

Taking these two figures together, we can estimate that some 21,000 non-statutorily homeless 16–24 year-olds<sup>6</sup> used Supporting People services in England during 2005–06 (Table 5).

**Table 5 Estimated number of households headed by non-statutorily homeless young people using Supporting People services in 2005–06 (Great Britain)**

	England	Scotland	Wales	Great Britain
Total non-statutorily homeless individuals (Estimated for Scotland and Wales)	46,000	16,300	5,700	68,000
Estimated percentage of whom were 16–17 year-olds	14	14	14	14
Estimated number of 16–17 year-olds	6,350	2,280	800	9,430
Estimated percentage of 16–24 year-olds	46	46	46	46
Estimated number of 16–24 year-olds	21,000	7,495	2,630	31,130

Source: SPCR statistics (England); Scottish Government statistics; Welsh Assembly Government statistics.

If it is assumed that the proportion of non-statutorily homeless 16–24 year olds using Supporting People services in Scotland and Wales was the same as for England, estimates can also be produced for these two countries (Table 5).<sup>7</sup> This generates an estimate for Great Britain of some 31,000 non-statutorily homeless 16–24 year olds using Supporting People services during 2005–06, of whom some 9,400 were 16–17 year-olds (Table 5). Data was unavailable for Northern Ireland.

The Supporting People Client Records (SPCR) for England in 2006–07 indicate that overall and proportionate levels of non-statutorily homeless households reported in these statistics were very similar to those reported in 2005–06.<sup>8</sup>

This level of non-statutory homelessness among young people is equivalent to:

- three out of every 1,000 16–24 year olds in England making use of Supporting People services as a non-statutorily homeless individual during the course of 2005–06;
- twelve out of every 1,000 16–24 year olds in Scotland making use of Supporting People services as a non-statutorily homeless person during 2005–06;
- seven out of every 1,000 16–24 year olds in Wales making use of Supporting People services as a non-statutorily homeless individual during 2005–06;
- four out of every 1,000 16–24 year olds in Great Britain making use of Supporting People services as a non-statutorily homeless individual during 2005–06.

### Housing associations’ lets to non-statutorily homeless households headed by young people

Table 6 shows recorded HA lets to *non-statutorily* homeless households headed by 16–24 year olds in England and Scotland.

**Table 6 Number of lets to non-statutorily homeless households headed by 16–24 year olds in England and Scotland by housing associations during 2006–07 (Great Britain)**

	England	Scotland*
Percentage of housing association lets	2	2
Number of households	2,015	366

\* Estimate based on CORE returns.

Source: CORE and SCORE statistics.

Data on HA lets in Wales and Northern Ireland in 2005–06 and 2006–07 were unavailable. However, it seems reasonable to suppose that something in excess of 2,400 housing association lets were made to non-statutorily homeless households headed by someone aged 16–24 in the UK, during 2006–07.<sup>9</sup>

### Rough sleeping

Rough sleeping is not easy to quantify. There are three main methods by which the numbers of people who sleep rough, and their patterns of sleeping rough, can be discerned.

- *Street counts*: annual street counts have been used by the Government to measure progress in reducing the incidence of rough sleeping over the last decade. While they can be useful to measure change over time (see CLG, 2007c and later in chapter), street counts also have a number of limitations. First, they are designed to record the population on one night, or across a few nights, which means they are not intended to produce data on the numbers experiencing rough sleeping annually (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2005). Second, counts cover only some areas, for example counts often cover central London but not all of London, and there is evidence that some young people sleep rough close to home (Fitzpatrick, 2000). Third, vulnerable groups like women and people from minority ethnic communities will tend to stay out of sight if they find themselves on the street, because of risks to their safety (see May *et al.*, 2007).
- *Contact with services*: statistics based on service use by people sleeping rough are, by definition, confined only to those who actually contact services. There is evidence that some groups like young women and young people with minority ethnic backgrounds may avoid some services like day centres because they do not feel safe (Pleace and Quilgars, 1996). Nonetheless, specialist outreach services (for example, the Leicester Outreach Team) can provide useful intelligence on rough sleeping patterns at a local level. They are also able to provide an indication of the numbers of people who utilise a service over the course of a year, rather than at one point in time.
- *Surveys of homeless people*: specific surveys of homeless people that ask about experiences of rough sleeping rely on memory recall but, with this proviso, can provide more detailed insights into patterns of rough sleeping among homeless people than counts or project statistics.

*Evidence of rough sleeping among young people*

It is important to draw a distinction between the numbers of young people who may be sleeping rough on any given night and young people who have had an experience of rough sleeping over a period of time. The evidence suggests that *significantly more young people experience rough sleeping over the course of a year than experience it on any given night.*

While street counts record between two and three hundred people sleeping rough on one night in London (CLG, 2007c), the longitudinal multi-agency CHAIN database reported 3,938 verified rough sleepers were contacted by services during 2006–07 in London.<sup>10</sup> However, only 7 per cent of contacts were aged under 26, which indicates that young people are a very small proportion of the ‘rough sleeping’ population, although they may number a couple of hundred experiencing this over a year.

Some of the case studies in the research also had local data on this issue. In Leicester, street outreach teams reported contact with 195 young people sleeping rough in a four-year period between 2003 and 2007.<sup>11</sup> The ECHO multi-agency database in Edinburgh (see Chapter 5) reported services contacting 298 young homeless people sleeping rough during 2005–06.<sup>12</sup> In the County Durham monitoring initiative (see Chapter 5), 97 out of a total of 1,927 young people aged 16–25 (5 per cent) approaching services (1 January 2006 to 31 December 2007) indicated that they were sleeping rough or had done so in the last two years.<sup>13</sup> In Belfast, the Rough Sleepers Strategy estimated that around 100 people were periodically sleeping rough within the city boundaries. However, no breakdown was available on age.

Data collected by the recent CLG survey of 16–17 year-olds accepted as statutorily homeless in England (Pleace *et al.*, 2008) indicated that 22 per cent of young people in this group had experienced sleeping rough at some point in the past. If all the 16–17 year olds accepted in England in 2006–07 had experienced rough sleeping at the same rate as those in this (nationally representative) CLG survey, some 1,200 would have had at least one experience of sleeping rough in their lives.

The HL1 data for Scotland showed that, in 2006–07, 7 per cent of young people aged 16–24 who were found statutorily homeless had slept rough during the past *three months* (591 individuals). A lower number (4 per cent) reported sleeping rough the night before (387 individuals).

There is evidence that a pool of very insecurely housed people, staying in direct access accommodation, with friends or relatives, or in squats, spend periods on and

off the street (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2005). In particular, young homeless people may, for lack of knowledge and resources, find themselves spending at least some time on the street, at least until they contact formal services (Fitzpatrick, 2000). Case study respondents in this study (both agencies and young people) reported that it was quite common for some young people to sleep out (for example, in parks, bus shelters, cars, etc.) for short periods of time, usually before accessing (but also while trying to access) accommodation and occasionally between accommodation settings. This picture of short periods of sleeping out may be quite different to the traditional understanding of rough sleeping where people may spend considerable periods on the streets. Nonetheless, overall, the evidence suggests that at least several hundred young people are without adequate shelter for a period of one night or more over the course of a year in the UK.

One agency representative commented:

... we all know where there are people in County Durham and elsewhere on the streets ... for me that is an area that still hasn't been properly tackled ... I bet if you go to individual homeless officers, social workers, they could all give you names of young people who have spent days living in a bush, so we are not there yet. (Statutory sector representative, Sedgefield)

### **Box 1 Estimated annual levels of youth homelessness**

Homelessness is not a fixed state for almost everyone who experiences it. Although most of what we know about the numbers of young people who experience homelessness in the UK comes from service contact information (and excludes 'hidden homelessness'), it is clear that tens of thousands of young people go through homelessness every year. The number was at least 75,000 in the UK in 2006–07, including:

- 43,000 young people accepted as statutorily homeless;
- at least 31,000 non-statutorily homeless young people using Supporting People services;
- at least 2,400 non-statutorily homeless young people rehoused by housing associations (this will overlap to some degree with the Supporting People statistics);
- at least several hundred young people experiencing rough sleeping during the course of a year (overlapping with other statistics to some extent).

*(Continued)*

This broad estimate is much lower than the estimate of 246,000 young people experiencing homelessness over 1994–95 reported by the last Inquiry into Youth Homelessness (Evans, 1996). This discrepancy is explained by the way in which the 246,000 estimate was produced and falls in levels of statutory homelessness (see next section and Appendix 1).

If the annual number of young people experiencing homelessness (about 75,000) is expressed as a proportion of the total population of young people in the UK, it can be suggested that one out of every 100 young people aged 16–24 experiences some form of homelessness annually. While this figure is constructed from diverse sources and estimates, some of which are incomplete or overlap, a sufficient number of those sources, such as the P1E statistics, CORE and the SPCR returns, are robust enough to suggest it is not merely a ‘guesstimate’, but has foundation in hard data. These findings suggest a significant youth homelessness problem still exists in the UK.

### **Levels of youth homelessness at any given point in time**

It is difficult to calculate the levels of youth homelessness at any one point in time because of poor data. Nonetheless, three sources of information can be used to generate an estimate (see Appendix 1):

- statutory homelessness returns on numbers of people placed in temporary accommodation;
- numbers of people using Supporting People services;
- rough sleeping counts.

### **The numbers of statutorily homeless young people in temporary accommodation at any one point in time**

In London and the South East of England, many statutorily homeless households face prolonged stays in temporary accommodation, because a suitable tenancy is not immediately available (Pleace *et al.*, 2008). In all parts of the UK, young people may also be placed in supported housing on a temporary basis to help prepare them for independent living before they move into their own tenancy (see Chapter 4).

During the second quarter of 2007, England began to conduct counts of statutorily homeless 16–17 year olds in temporary accommodation within each local authority (Table 7). This data gives us the number of statutorily homeless young people in temporary accommodation at *one point in time* rather than an annual figure (2,384 at June 2007).

This data also shows that 44 per cent of all statutorily homeless 16–17 year olds in temporary accommodation at the end of June 2007 were in London, with the South East accounting for another 16 per cent (60 per cent overall were in London or the South East) (Table 7).

**Table 7 Sixteen to 17 year olds placed in temporary accommodation by local authorities in England at the end of June 2007**

Region	Total number	Average	Median	Percentage of national total
London	1,035	40	24	44
South East	382	6	2	16
South West	235	6	3	10
East of England	207	5	2	9
North West	146	4	3	6
Yorkshire and the Humber	129	7	3	5
West Midlands	117	4	1	5
East Midlands	85	2	1	4
North East	48	2	1	2
Total	2,384	7	2	100

This data is based on reported returns only and does not include estimates for non-responding local authorities.

Source: P1E statistics, June 2007 (England).

In addition, the data records the types of temporary accommodation these 16–17 year olds were resident in, showing that 29 per cent were in hostels or other supported housing and that another 42 per cent were in various forms of self-contained housing. A perhaps surprisingly high number (25 per cent) were in B&B hotels. However, only 9 per cent of 16–17 year olds had been in B&B for a period exceeding six weeks.

This partial picture is all that can be achieved with current data. Other parts of the UK do not record this detail.<sup>14</sup>



Some estimates of temporary accommodation use at one point in time can be produced if a broad assumption is made. This assumption is that there are *proportionately* the same number of young people aged 16–24 in temporary accommodation as are accepted as homeless in England, Wales and Scotland. Table 8 shows this estimate for England,<sup>15</sup> Scotland and Wales.

**Table 8 Estimate of average households headed by someone aged 16–24 who had been found unintentionally statutorily homeless in temporary accommodation on any given day during 2006–07 (Great Britain)**

	England	Scotland	Wales	Great Britain
Number of households in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2007	87,120	9,164	3,442	99,726
Estimated percentage of young people (based on proportion of acceptances that were young people)	39	35	43	39
Estimated number of households headed by 16–24 year-olds	33,977	3,207	1,480	38,664

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

In Northern Ireland, some 3,500 statutorily homeless households were found temporary accommodation *during* 2006. Northern Ireland also recorded that three out of five statutorily homeless households were rehoused within six months.<sup>16</sup> The number of statutorily homeless young people in temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland at any one point in time was probably quite low during 2006–07. These quite low rates of temporary accommodation use are similar to those found in large areas of the North and Midlands of England (Pleace *et al.*, 2008).

### **Numbers of non-statutorily homeless young people using Supporting People services at any one point in time**

Over the course of one year, it was estimated above that some 31,000 non-statutorily homeless young people are using Supporting People services in Great Britain. If we assume that typical length of contact with Supporting People services is around six months, with approximately three-quarters of service use being supported housing,<sup>17</sup> it would be the case that the number of non-statutorily homeless 16–24 year-olds in contact with Supporting People services at any one point would be around 11,500.<sup>18</sup> This is simply an informed guess, however, and it might be the case that the service turnover is rather lower or higher.



### Numbers of young people sleeping rough on any given night

In June 2006, local housing authorities in England were asked to produce an estimate of rough sleeping in their areas. Collectively, the authorities estimated some 500 people were sleeping rough, with 279 authorities (79 per cent) reporting no rough sleepers. In June 2007, another estimate was produced, although this time authorities were asked to band their estimate into various categories starting with '0–10' rough sleepers. Most authorities reported they were in this first category and did not undertake counts. Eighty-three authorities conducted counts and these reported 498 people sleeping rough, very close to the level estimated in 2006 (CLG, 2007c).

Estimates for Scotland suggest that 60 or so people were sleeping rough each night during 2006.<sup>19</sup> Data was unavailable for the whole of Wales or Northern Ireland,<sup>20</sup> but numbers of rough sleepers in both are presumed to be low. In Belfast, the 2004–06 Rough Sleepers Strategy estimated there were approximately seven rough sleepers in the city each night.

These figures suggest that, given the numbers of people sleeping rough on a nightly basis, the numbers of young people sleeping rough on a given night will be low. As reported earlier, what data there is suggests that young people make up only a small proportion of rough sleepers.<sup>21</sup>

However, as was described in detail above, the rates at which young people actually experience rough sleeping do seem to be much higher than these street counts might suggest.

#### **Box 2 The numbers of young people who are homeless at any point in time**

The estimate of the number of young people who are homeless at one point in time varies greatly depending on whether statutorily homeless young people in temporary accommodation are defined as 'homeless' or not.

If those in temporary accommodation are included, it can be estimated that something of the order of 50,000 young people may have experienced homelessness on any given day during 2006–07:

- approximately 38,500 statutorily homeless young people were in temporary accommodation at any given point in time during 2006–07 (with this figure

*(Continued)*

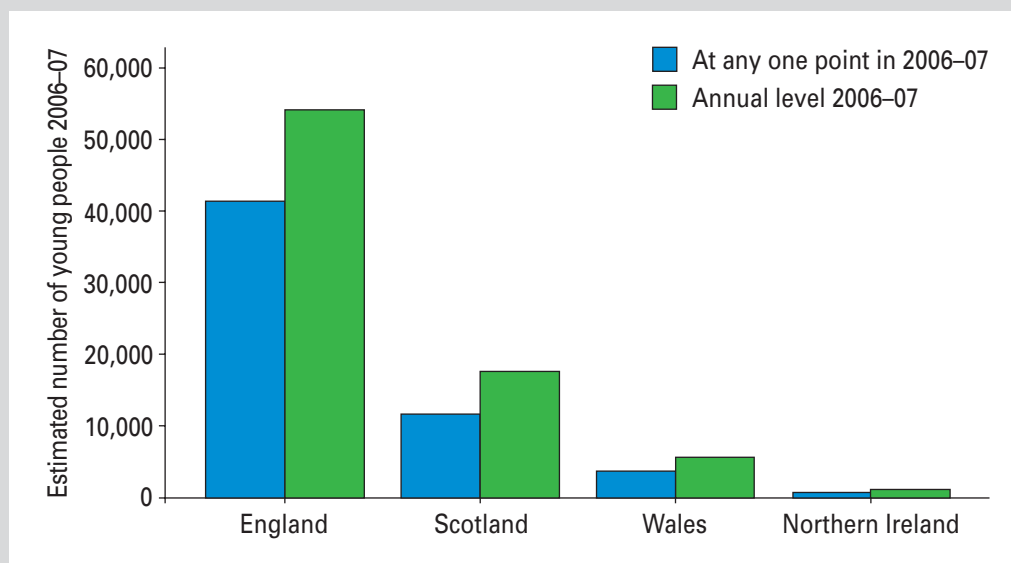
highly concentrated around London and including homeless families headed by a 16–24 year old);

- an estimated 11,500 non-statutorily homeless young people were using Supporting People services at any one point across Great Britain;
- a small number were sleeping rough on any given day.

If those young people who were statutorily homeless and awaiting settled housing in temporary accommodation were not regarded as homeless, this broadly estimated figure would drop to around 11–12,000.

### Box 3 The ‘stock’ and ‘prevalence’ of youth homelessness in the UK

Figure 1 Estimate of numbers of young people homeless at any one point in 2006–07 and total number of young people affected over 2006–07



## Changes in the level of youth homelessness

### Annual levels of young people accepted as homeless because they were ‘at risk’

Local authorities in England used to vary widely in how they interpreted their duties to young homeless people. In 1993, just two authorities, Manchester City Council and

Leeds, were responsible for 20 per cent of the *national* acceptances of vulnerable young people found homeless and in priority need because they were ‘at risk’.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, 44 per cent of the district councils in England found no young people to be homeless and in priority need because they were ‘at risk’ during the same year.

The current homelessness legislation has been fully operational in England for the past four financial years. In the early 2000s, there were substantial increases in acceptances linked to the widened priority needs groups (see Chapter 1 and Table 9). The legislative change appears to have brought about a much more consistent response to youth homelessness across local housing authorities in England. Only 3 per cent of local housing authorities did not accept any young homeless people as statutorily homeless in 2005–06 (compared to 33 per cent of authorities in 1993).

**Table 9 Annual numbers of young people found accepted as unintentionally homeless due to vulnerability linked to their age 1999–98 to 2006–07 (United Kingdom)**

Year	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland*	United Kingdom
1997–98	3,150	**2,112	247	770	6,279
1998–99	3,460	**2,208	224	818	6,710
1999–2000	3,550	**2,424	182	653	6,809
2000–01	4,960	**2,460	241	824	8,485
2001–02	5,800	**3,216	706	1,002	10,724
2002–03	8,000	3,278	893	1,096	13,267
2003–04	11,050	3,150	1,115	1,170	16,485
2004–05	10,560	3,181	1,150	1,073	15,964
2005–06	8,345	3,261	851	1,052	13,509
2006–07	6,384	3,043	828	1,079	11,334

\* Figures for Northern Ireland are for 16–25 year olds.

\*\* Estimate based on priority need group distribution in applicant households (data on households assessed as homeless is unavailable).

Note: Shaded area indicates period following homelessness legislative change in the country.

Source: Reported and Grossed P1E returns (England), HL1 returns (Scotland), WHO-12 returns (Wales), Northern Ireland housing statistics. Includes young people ‘at risk’ in England and Wales during 1997–98 to 2001–02, 16–17 year olds and 18–20-year-old care leavers in England (from 2002–03 onwards) and those at risk of exploitation in Scotland and Wales (aged 18–20 in Wales) from 2002–03 onwards and young people accepted as statutorily homeless in Northern Ireland.

In 1997, Scotland extended its priority needs groups to include young people leaving care<sup>23</sup> and began to record statistics on all young people accepted because they were at risk or care leavers. Legislative change added 16–17 year olds and other groups in 2001–02 (see Chapter 1 and Table 10). In Wales, authorities used the same broadly defined ‘young person at risk’ category as was employed in England, until mid 2001–02 when legislative change led to the recording of 16–17 year olds and 18–20 year olds who were care leavers or at risk.

**Table 10 All households accepted as unintentionally statutorily homeless because applicant was in a young person priority need group (United Kingdom) as a proportion of annual homelessness acceptances**

Year	England (%)	Scotland (%)	Wales (%)	Northern Ireland* (%)
1997–98	3	**12	6	16
1998–99	3	**12	5	16
1999–2000	3	**12	5	13
2000–01	4	**12	5	13
2001–02	5	**12	13	14
2002–03	6	11	13	13
2003–04	8	10	12	14
2004–05	9	10	12	13
2005–06	9	10	11	11
2006–07	9	10	12	12

\* Figures for Northern Ireland are for 16–25 year olds.

\*\* Estimated based on available data.

Note: Shaded area indicates period following homelessness legislative change in the country.

Source: P1E returns (England), HL1 returns (Scotland), WHO-12 returns (Wales), Northern Ireland housing statistics.

Northern Ireland currently employs a broad ‘at risk’ category and records young people who are accepted as homeless (there was discussion that a new priority need group for 16–17 year olds would be implemented at the time of writing, see Chapter 1).

Table 9 tracks the levels of acceptances of young people in priority need groups linked specifically to their age during the period 1997–98 to 2006–07. Legislative change in England, Wales and Scotland means that like is not being compared with like over the whole period (legislative changes that altered priority needs groups are illustrated by the shading shown in the table). Rises occurred in England, Scotland and Wales associated with legislative changes that broadened the age-related priority needs groups (as highlighted in Table 9).

England saw initial rises followed by sharp falls in acceptances of young people because they were care leavers or 16–17 year olds. This was in line with the general decline in statutory homelessness acceptances in England associated with homelessness prevention (see Chapters 1 and 4). Acceptances fell by 73 per cent between 2003–04 and 2006–07. The figures remained stable in Scotland, while there was a less radical reduction in Wales over the last two years.

Table 10 shows the changes in the proportion of total acceptances of unintentionally homeless households in priority need accounted for by young people who were in an age-related priority need group. The table includes young people accepted because they were ‘at risk’, 16–17 year olds, care leavers and other *age-specific* priority needs groups. Legislative change that widened the age-specific priority needs groups is again highlighted.

Proportionate acceptances of young people in age-specific priority needs groups in England and Wales increased, though not massively, as a result of legislative changes from 2001–02 onwards and have remained static since that time (Table 10). Despite the falling number of acceptances in England in the last couple of years, in proportionate terms, acceptances of young people in these priority needs groups have remained constant. Scotland and Wales have not shown proportionate change, but it should be remembered that Scotland broadened its priority needs groups for care leavers in 1997–98, while Northern Ireland’s priority needs groups have not been altered.

### **All households accepted as statutorily homeless in which the applicant was aged 16–24**

Data on statutorily homeless households that are headed by a 16–24 year old have been collected in England only for the past two financial years. For Scotland and Wales, the same information is available from 2002–03 onwards. Data has been recorded since 1995–96 on 16–25 year olds in Northern Ireland. Table 11 employs this data to generate estimates of the numbers of statutorily homeless households headed by 16–24-year-old applicants during the last decade.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 11 Annual numbers of households accepted as unintentionally statutorily homeless in which the applicant was a young person (United Kingdom)**

Year	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland*	United Kingdom
1997–98	**35,972	**5,400	**1,636	770	**43,778
1998–99	**36,704	**5,800	**1,733	818	**45,055
1999–2000	**37,232	**6,500	**1,460	653	**45,845
2000–01	**40,868	**6,700	**1,756	824	**50,148
2001–02	**41,664	**8,500	**2,133	1,002	**53,299
2002–03	**51,416	8,684	2,772	1,096	**63,968
2003–04	**54,172	8,998	3,732	1,170	**68,072
2004–05	**48,344	9,044	3,982	1,073	**62,443
2005–06	36,765	9,447	3,203	1,052	50,467
2006–07	29,937	9,132	2,927	1,079	**43,075

\* Figures for Northern Ireland are for 16–25 year olds.

\*\* Estimated based on available data.

Note: Shaded area indicates period following homelessness legislative change in the country.

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

These figures include all households headed by young people, including young people accepted because they were 16–17 year olds, care leavers or ‘at risk’, alongside young people accepted because they had dependent children of their own, or because they were in priority need because a care or support need made them ‘vulnerable’ (see Chapter 1). Again, the picture is one of rises in Scotland, Wales and England linked to legislative changes. In Northern Ireland, there is also evidence of increases, though not in this instance linked to legislative change, which suggests other reasons were causing an increase.

In England, a quite marked rise in 2002–03 is followed by falling levels, again reflecting the impact of the preventative agenda. The data for England indicates a 23 per cent fall in acceptances of households headed by 16–24 year olds (from 36,765 in 2005–06 to 29,937 in 2006–07, see Table 11).

Estimates can also be produced for the proportion of total acceptances of unintentionally homeless households in priority need that were households headed by young people (Table 12).

**Table 12 All households accepted as unintentionally statutorily homeless in which the applicant was a young person (United Kingdom) as a proportion of all homelessness acceptances**

Year	England (%)	Scotland (%)	Wales (%)	Northern Ireland* (%)
1997–98	**35	**31	**40	16
1998–99	**35	**32	**40	16
1999–2000	**35	**32	**40	13
2000–01	**36	**33	**40	13
2001–02	**36	**32	**40	14
2002–03	**40	30	40	13
2003–04	**40	29	41	14
2004–05	**40	29	40	13
2005–06	39	29	41	11
2006–07	41	29	43	12

\* Figures for Northern Ireland are for 16–25 year olds.

\*\* Estimated based on available data.

Note: Shaded area indicates period following homelessness legislative change in the country.

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

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, proportional acceptances of households headed by young people have remained more or less static (Table 12). In England, it can be estimated that there was a small increase in 2002–03, linked to legislative change, though we do not have firm data for any years other than 2005–06 and 2006–07. While numbers of acceptances of households headed by 16–24 year olds in England fell during 2006–07 compared to 2005–06, the proportion of acceptances of households headed by young people remained quite steady (from 39 to 41 per cent).

### Non-statutory homelessness

The available data on non-statutorily homelessness among young people is not sufficiently robust or complete to allow detailed analysis on how levels have changed. This is in part because our main source of data on this group, the SPCR statistics monitoring Supporting People service use, do not date back very far (2003–04). In addition, for 18–21 per cent of cases in the SPCR dataset, whether or not a household is statutorily homeless has not been recorded. There is relatively little information for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

The Supporting People data for England indicates three trends. The first is a fairly small drop in the number of service users between 2003–04 and 2005–06, which would be expected due to year-on-year budget cuts. The second trend is a tendency for statutorily homeless households to be less common (31 per cent of service users in 2003–04 and 26 per cent in 2005–06), which is accounted for by the impact of prevention. The third trend is that levels of non-statutorily homeless households have remained *constant* at around 50 per cent of total service users. This indicates that the levels of non-statutorily homeless households using Supporting People services have not fallen. If our assumptions about the age range of this client group hold true year on year, the levels of non-statutorily homeless young people using these services have *not* declined significantly over the period 2003–04 to 2006–07.

With respect to rough sleeping, annual street counts have reported a considerable reduction in numbers, from around 1,850 people sleeping rough per night in England in June 1998 to about 500 people in June 2007 (CLG, 2007c). In Scotland, current levels are estimated to be around 60 rough sleepers per night (Anderson, 2008), compared to a peak of around 200–300 during 2002–03 (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2005). There is no data that allows us to estimate the rate at which young homeless people might have experienced rough sleeping a decade ago, though levels were thought to be quite high at that time (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2005). The limited available evidence suggests that the numbers of young people sleeping rough for any period of time on the streets will have reduced over the last decade (alongside overall reductions). However, the numbers experiencing more hidden and short-term rough sleeping over time cannot be estimated.

### Demographic patterns within youth homelessness

Data on the demographic characteristics of young homeless people is drawn from a variety of sources of information, including:

- homelessness statistics in the four nations;
- analysis of the CLG survey of households accepted as homeless (including homeless families headed by someone aged 16–24 and 16–17 year olds) (see Chapter 1 and Appendix 1);
- individual studies on youth homelessness;
- project statistics (e.g. Centrepont).



Unfortunately, time series data is virtually non-existent, therefore trends over time are difficult to discern.

### Age

It is not possible to give a reliable breakdown as to the proportion of young people in different age bands. However, the CLG survey revealed that 19 per cent of young homeless families were aged between 16 and 18, 32 per cent were 19 or 20 years old and 50 per cent were 21 or older.

Some young people become homeless before the age of 16. One in nine young people run away from home at least once before turning 16 (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002) and some young people leave the parental home to live with other family members (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Quilgars *et al.*, 2004).

### Gender

Young women are more likely to be accepted as statutorily homeless than young men in all four countries. Women outnumbered men among 16–24 year olds accepted as homeless in Wales (70 per cent), Scotland (61 per cent) and Northern Ireland (56 per cent) over the period 2002–03 to 2006–07 (Table 13). This is almost certainly true for England, as 39 per cent of all acceptances (across the age groups) were lone female parents and 16 per cent were single females (Cabinet Office, 2006).<sup>25</sup>

**Table 13 Gender of lead applicant in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland among households headed by young people accepted as statutorily homeless, 2002–03 to 2006–07 (percentages in brackets)**

Gender of applicant	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland*
Female	28,777 (61)	11,644 (70)	2,470 (56)
Male	18,687 (39)	4,972 (30)	1,921 (44)
All	47,464 (100)	16,616 (100)	4,391 (100)

\* Figures are for 16–25 year olds for Northern Ireland, but for 16–24 year olds for Scotland and Wales.

Source: HL1 statistics (Scotland), WHO-12 statistics (Wales), Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

ODPM data (2006) also found that 42 per cent of 16–17 year olds accepted as in priority need in the 2004–05 category were men, while 53 per cent were women. It was also noted that percentages varied significantly across the regions of England.

In addition, the CLG survey found that 62 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds were female compared to only 38 per cent of men.

The picture may be different for young homeless people not accepted as statutorily homeless. In 2006–07, women represented 38 per cent of all recorded ‘homeless’ clients of Supporting People services in England (SPCR data), while men accounted for 62 per cent. In particular, women only accounted for just over a third of ‘lone homeless people’ and 12 per cent of those sleeping rough. It should be noted that there is no age breakdown for this data.

It is difficult to assess change over time. Case study respondents suggest that a higher proportion of young women, especially 16 and 17 year olds, are presenting as homeless to services than in the past. However, there is no data to verify this. The background research report for the last youth homelessness inquiry (Smith *et al.*, 1996) found that, in most cities, women formed a slight majority of young homeless people when families were included – and also pointed out that young women were more likely to be recorded in housing need than as homeless. Other research has also shown that women tend to utilise different housing services than men (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Cramer and Carter, 2001).

### Household type

HL1 data (own analysis) on homelessness acceptances in Scotland provides a detailed breakdown on the household type of accepted households aged 16–24: 57 per cent were single, 17 per cent were lone parents, 20 per cent were couples with child(ren) and 6 per cent were in other households types. English data is not able to provide an age breakdown (ODPM, 2006), but, within all statutorily homeless households, 33 per cent were single, 42 per cent were lone parents, 18 per cent were couples with child(ren) and 7 per cent were in other households types.

The majority of non-statutorily homeless households are single people without children. However, it is important to note that there is no data on how many people are in relationships, nor on how many people have children who are not currently living with them. In addition, young people may move from one status to another – for example, some homeless young women become pregnant while in single-person hostels (Gorton, 2000). The CLG survey revealed that 10 per cent of young women

accepted as a homeless 16 or 17 year old were pregnant at the point of survey (Pleace *et al.*, 2008).

### Ethnicity

Statutorily homeless households headed by a 16–24 year old are very unlikely to be minority ethnic households in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland (homeless statistics indicate that less than 1 per cent are).

However, in England, 21 per cent of statutorily homeless households were headed by someone with a minority ethnic background in 2006–07 (no age breakdown available). The recent CLG survey found that 18 per cent of homeless 16 and 17 year olds, and 15 per cent of 16–24-year-old heads of homeless families, were from a minority ethnic group. Table 14 shows that black/black British households and those of mixed minority ethnic backgrounds were over-represented (but not people of Asian background).

**Table 14 Ethnicity of young people accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need in England, 2005, CLG survey and census data**

	Families with head aged 16–24 (%)	16 and 17 year olds (%)	England population (2001 Census) (%)
White – British, Irish or any other white background	85	82	91
Black or black British – Caribbean, African, any other black background	8	10	2
Mixed – white and black Caribbean, white and black African, white and Asian or any other mixed background	3	4	1
Asian or Asian British – Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, any other Asian background	3	2	5
Chinese or other ethnic group	1	2	1
Total	100	100	100

Base: 789 (16–24s), 350 (16–17s), 49,138,831 (Census).

Sources: CLG survey (own reanalysis); 2001 Census (population aged 16+).

Minority ethnic households account for particularly high proportions of homelessness acceptances in London (ETHNOS, 2005). Evidence also suggests that this is the case among young people using hostels in the capital. Recent Centrepoint statistics showed that 76 per cent of its hostel users were from a minority ethnic background (Trieu, 2008). This also represents a significant change over time, as 48 per cent of young people using Centrepoint's hostels in London were of minority ethnic origin in the mid-1990s (Smith *et al.*, 1996). Lambeth case study providers in this study also reported an increase in the proportions of young people from minority ethnic groups using all types of homelessness services. However, this may not hold true across England, as Leicester reported that young people from a minority ethnic background were not approaching homelessness services in the proportions expected.

Other research has also found an over-representation of black young people in hostels (Julienne, 1998), as well as a number of differences in the experiences of homelessness between young people from different ethnic groups (Davies, 1996; Rooney and Brown, 1996; Steele, 1997).

### Nationality

People with origins outside the UK comprise a small proportion of the young homeless population. The CLG survey revealed that 6 per cent of the 16 and 17 year olds, and 4 per cent of the heads of 16–24-year-old homeless families had claimed asylum in the UK at some point in the past.<sup>26</sup> Some case study agencies reported witnessing an increase in the numbers of refugees presenting to services, particularly in London. A recent study found that 19 per cent of beds in 58 hostels in London were occupied by refugees and asylum seekers on a one night count (Broadway, 2004), 82 per cent of whom were under the age of 35. In addition, agencies pointed out that former unaccompanied minors were an important, if relatively small, group of homeless young people.

It is not possible to say whether the proportion of (former) asylum seekers is increasing. They were a significant minority of homeless young people in the early 1990s – 10 per cent of 16–24 year olds in the last survey of single homeless people left their last home because of the political situation in their country (Anderson *et al.*, 1993) – but this was at the height of asylum claims in the UK and when asylum seekers were entitled to full welfare benefits.

Recent research has also shown that a small but significant minority of people using homeless hostels in London are A8 migrants (Homeless Link, 2006). Respondents were concerned that increasing numbers of A8 migrants may be among the future youth homelessness population.

### 3 Pathways into, and the impact of, youth homelessness in the UK

#### Key points

- Research has consistently demonstrated that young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds and/or those experiencing disruption or trauma during childhood are at increased risk of homelessness.
- The main ‘trigger’ for homelessness among young people is relationship breakdown (typically with parents or step-parents). For many, this is a consequence of long-term conflict within the home and often involves violence.
- Young homeless people have much poorer health than housed young people. Depression and other mental health problems are prevalent, as are substance misuse problems, including binge drinking and illicit drug use (with the latter appearing to be shaped by the regional supply of street drugs).
- A significant minority of young homeless people have multiple needs. While there is a widespread belief that the proportion of young homeless people with complex needs is increasing, many agencies note that this may reflect better recognition of need rather than a tangible increase in its prevalence or complexity *per se*.
- Homelessness compounds a number of the problems faced by young people. It often has a negative effect on their mental health and/or contributes to the onset of (or exacerbation of existing) substance misuse problems (particularly polysubstance use). There is also strong evidence that homelessness severely impedes young people’s participation in employment, education or training, with many becoming NEET after leaving their last settled home.
- A majority of young people feel that their lives are ‘on hold’ while they are living in temporary accommodation.
- Many of the other impacts of homelessness on young people are very mixed. For some, social networks are severely fractured, but many gain instrumental and emotional support from new sources – particularly professional support workers. Homelessness can be associated with experiences of fear, violence and/or involvement in ‘risky behaviour’, but may also lead to increased feelings of safety and an overall improvement in quality of life.

## Introduction

This chapter examines three key aspects of the experience of youth homelessness. First, it looks in more detail at the groups of young people who are most at risk of homelessness, as well as their health and support status. Second, the main reasons for homelessness are reviewed, including ‘triggers’ that lead to a loss of home and wider housing market factors. Third, evidence on the impacts of homelessness on young people is presented.

The chapter draws on the research evidence over the last decade, as well as the case study work. In addition, key statistical information drawn from official statistics and the CLG survey of homeless families and 16 and 17 year olds is utilised (see Appendix 1).

## Young people at risk of homelessness

### Backgrounds and risk factors

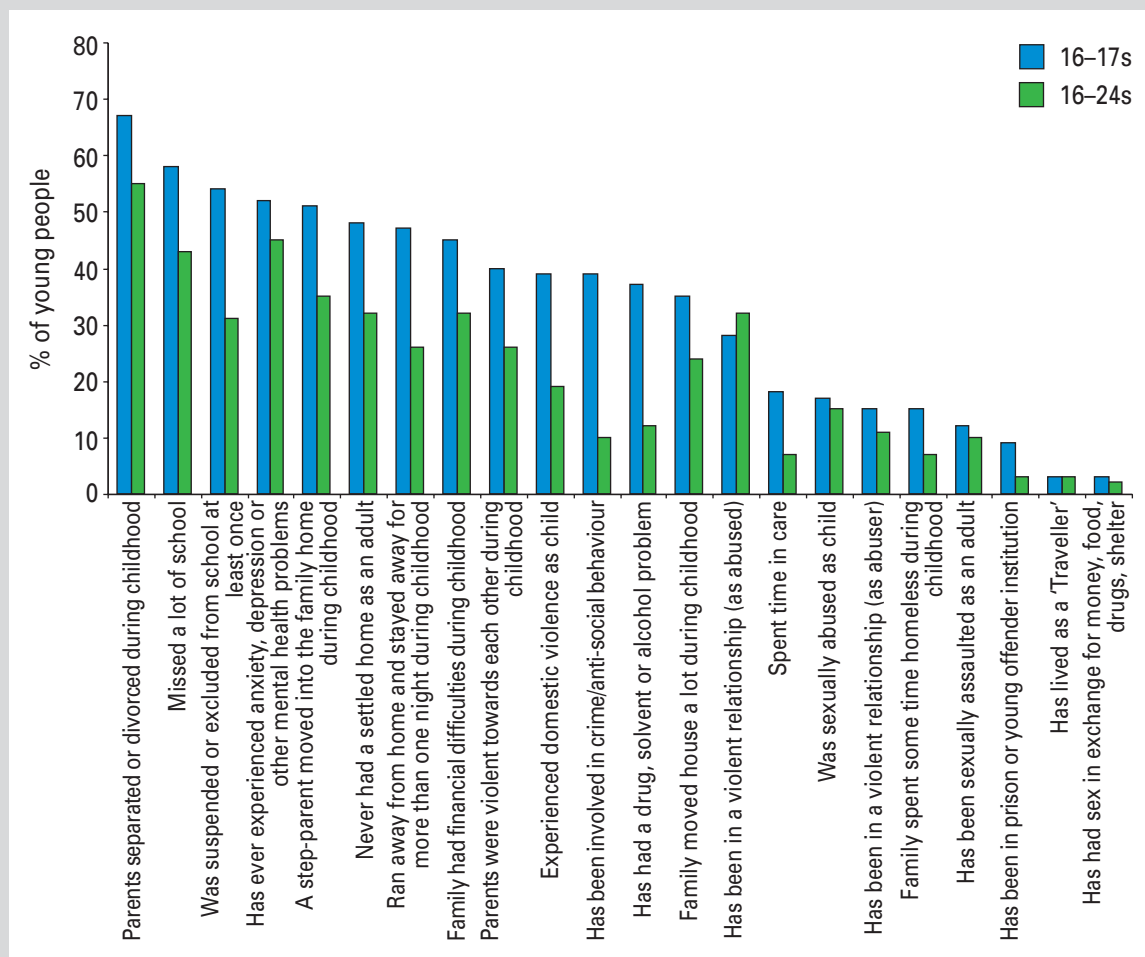
Research has consistently demonstrated that young homeless people have typically experienced disrupted and disadvantaged childhoods. The recent CLG survey collected the most robust evidence on young homeless people’s background and vulnerabilities to date (Pleace *et al.*, 2008), and this is summarised in Box 4.

#### **Box 4 Past experiences of young homeless people: evidence from the CLG survey**

The CLG survey asked young people accepted as statutorily homeless about their past experiences. Two groups were surveyed: young people in priority need because they were aged 16 or 17; and young homeless families headed by someone aged between 16 and 24 years old. Their responses, shown in Figure 2, reveal that the majority had experienced some form of trauma, disruption and/or social exclusion during childhood.

*(Continued)*

**Figure 2 Past experiences of young homeless people: evidence from the CLG survey**



Base: 789 (16–24s), 350 (16–17s). More than one response possible. Many questions were self-completion questions.  
 Source: CLG survey (own reanalysis).

Young people accepted as homeless 16–17 year olds were more likely than the 16–24-year-old heads of homeless families to report having experienced most of the issues identified. Further analysis of the CLG survey – comparing the experiences of household heads aged 16–24 and those aged 25 years and older – revealed that homeless families headed by someone aged between 16 and 24 were more likely than those headed by someone aged 25 or over to have experienced parental divorce or separation, to have had a step-parent move into the home, to have been suspended/excluded from school, or to have ‘missed a lot of school’ when growing up (although, notably, they were equally likely to have spent time in care). There was strong evidence that these young people were from poor backgrounds. Further detailed analysis of the personal history data provided by 16–17 year olds revealed that one-quarter (26 per cent) were classified as having ‘multiple problems’ (Pleace *et al.*, 2008).

Evidence from the CLG survey, together with a review of other key studies in the past decade (e.g. Anderson *et al.*, 1993; Biehal *et al.*, 1995; Craig *et al.*, 1996; Smith *et al.*, 1998; Bruegel and Smith, 1999; Fitzpatrick, 2000; O'Connor and Molloy, 2001; Randall and Brown, 2002; Smith, 2003; Rees and Lee, 2005), indicate that young homeless people are likely to have:

- experienced family disruption (because of parental separation or divorce and/or the arrival of a step-parent);
- had difficulty getting on with parents;
- witnessed or experienced violence within the family home;
- lived in a family that experienced financial difficulties;
- run away from home;
- spent time in care;
- been involved in crime or anti-social behaviour;
- had their education severely disrupted (e.g. been suspended or excluded from school).

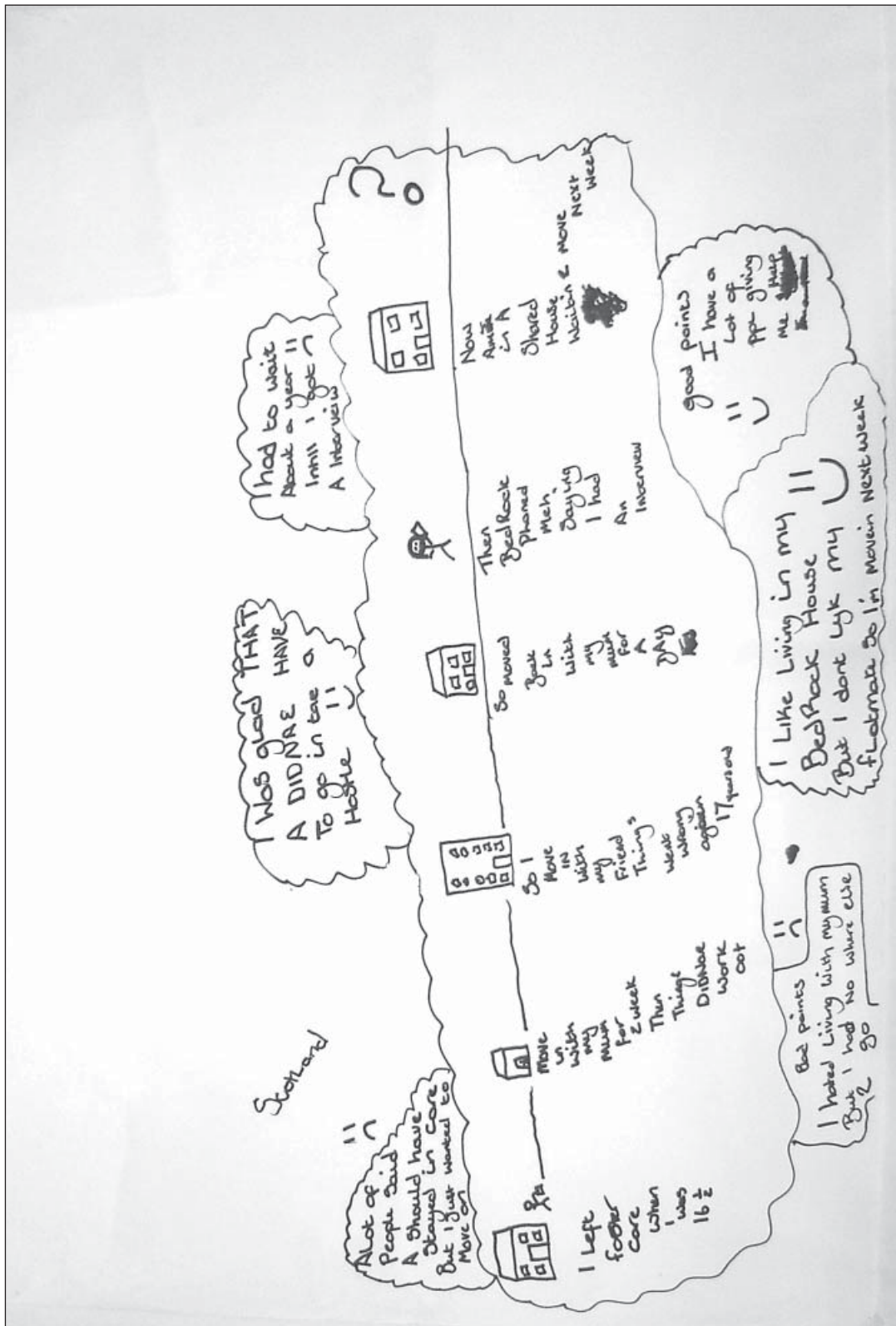
Research often identifies one or more of the above characteristics as 'risk factors' that heighten a young person's likelihood of experiencing homelessness (e.g. Craig *et al.*, 1996; Bruegel and Smith, 1999; Scottish Homes, 2001; Smith, 2003).

In addition, young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness (Pleace *et al.*, 2008). Research in London demonstrated that young homeless people originate disproportionately from the most deprived wards (Bruegel and Smith, 1999), and European comparative research confirms that the associations between youth homelessness and socio-economic marginalisation are widespread in developed economies (van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997). A number of agency respondents pointed to increasing social exclusion and wider societal change as explanatory factors of homelessness:

It's people who come from estates, whose mums and dads don't work, have had no career. You don't get posh kids in hostels. You really don't.  
(Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)



Journey 1 Young people's homelessness journeys: Example 1



Source: Young person's consultation event (see Appendix 1).

To some extent the people who didn't come out of the eighties particularly well are still struggling to see any successes ... children of Thatcher's bastardisation of the whole sort of social culture thing ... a lot of people who really don't feel that society has done them particularly well – and it hasn't – and therefore don't feel particularly inclined to put a contribution back in ... I mean it's picking up the bits of dysfunctional society of the last 20 years, the consequences of it. (Statutory sector representative, Edinburgh)

Beyond the broad associations with socio-economic exclusion and disrupted childhoods, a number of groups of young people have been consistently identified as being particularly susceptible to homelessness, or face very specific challenges in securing accommodation, including:

- care leavers (Barnardo's, 1997; Wade *et al.*, 1998; Biehal and Wade, 1999; Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2004; Stein, 2004; Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2006, Elsley *et al.*, 2007);
- young offenders (Carlen, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2000);
- young people from a minority ethnic background (Davies, 1996; Rooney and Brown, 1996; Steele, 1997; Julienne, 1998; Smith and Gilford, 1998);
- gay and lesbian young people (Dunne *et al.*, 2001, 2002; O'Connor and Molloy, 2001; Prendergast *et al.*, 2001);
- runaways (Christie, 1999; Safe on the Streets, 1999; Bluett *et al.*, 2000; Raws, 2001; Rees, 2001; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Rees and Lee, 2005).

### Health and support needs of young homeless people

The relatively poor health of young homeless people has been demonstrated consistently over the past 15 years (Anderson *et al.*, 1993; Bines, 1994; Thomson, 2003), with young homeless people often presenting with practical and emotional support needs linked to their life experience (Pleace, 1995; Pleace *et al.*, 2008). The CLG survey confirmed that homeless young people consider their general health to be poorer than that of young people nationally (Pleace *et al.*, 2008).

A lack of longitudinal research makes it difficult to ascertain how far the health problems they report pre-exist homelessness and how far they are a consequence

of homelessness. Some research has indicated that homeless people do not tend to differ markedly in health status from poorer, housed populations, with the exception of people sleeping rough, whose health status is markedly worse (Victor, 1992; Pleace and Quilgars, 1996; Quilgars and Pleace, 2003). That said, a couple of studies have revealed that the differential health status between young homeless people and other young people is greater than for any other age group (Bines, 1994); and comparisons to low-income, housed young people reveal significant differences (Craig *et al.*, 1996).

This section considers the health status of young homeless people, while the last section of the chapter attempts to identify the evidence on specific *impacts* of homelessness.

There is extensive evidence of high rates of depression and other psychiatric disorders among homeless young people (Craig *et al.*, 1996; Gill *et al.*, 1996; Pleace and Quilgars, 1996; Commander *et al.*, 1998; Reid and Klee, 1999; Craig and Hodson, 2000; Vasiliou, 2006). One-third (33 per cent) of the 16–17 year olds and one-quarter (23 per cent) of the 16–24-year-old heads of homeless families in the CLG survey reported that they currently suffered from depression, anxiety or other mental health problems (a rate approximately three times that of the general population) (Pleace *et al.*, 2008).

Although estimates vary on the prevalence of drug problems among homeless people, most studies indicate relatively high levels of use among single people (Hammersley, 1996; Flemen, 1997; Adamczuk, 2000; Reed, 2002; Wincup *et al.*, 2003). Gill *et al.* (1996) found that 57 per cent of young men in hostels (aged 16–24) took at least one illegal drug (as had 33 per cent of young women). Heroin dependency appears higher in particular localities and among particular groups. One-third of rough sleepers aged 16 to 24 were heroin dependent in Glasgow, for example (Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001).

Problematic alcohol use is less often reported but may still be significant. For example, Wincup *et al.* (2003) identified 14 per cent of young people in their sample as problem drinkers. In the CLG survey, 12 per cent of the 16–17s reported having problems because of current drug or solvent use, and 7 per cent reported current alcohol problems (compared with only 1 per cent of 16–24s in homeless families reporting current drug or solvent problems, and 1 per cent alcohol problems).<sup>1</sup>

As Box 4 earlier in this chapter notes, a significant proportion of statutorily homeless young people in England – particularly those accepted as 16–17 year olds – have suffered multiple forms of trauma, and many self-reported current mental health and/or substance misuse problems. Case study respondents often reported a rise in

the proportion of young people presenting with complex needs as compared to five or ten years ago – and this they often attributed to an apparent increase in mental health, and related, problems:

My impression is that there is a greater instance of drug use, alcohol use, mental health issues, lack of self-esteem, lack of belief that the young person can actually do anything. I find all those sorts of things becoming more and more entrenched with that age group. (Statutory sector representative, Edinburgh)

However, it was thought that some of this observed rise was a result of providers now being better at identifying the full range of young people's needs:

I think the complex needs of young people have always been there. I think that over the last few years it's been highlighted, thankfully in a positive way because of the multi-agency interventions ... We're working more effectively at recognising them. (Voluntary sector representative, Leicester)

At the same time, a couple of providers also suggested that they were working with fewer young people with very high support needs following the success of outreach services to young people sleeping rough. A suggestion was made that the pattern of support needs may have truncated, with more young people presenting with relatively complex support needs, but fewer with either very high or low support needs.

## **Reasons for homelessness**

Considerable research has been conducted on the pathways into homelessness for young people over the last decade, and it is generally accepted that youth homelessness is a result of a complex interaction between individual characteristics and experiences and wider structural factors (Jones, 1995; Pleace and Quilgars, 1999; Bruegel and Smith, 1999; Fitzpatrick, 1999, 2000). Research has shown that the pathways into homelessness can be complex, and often lengthy, because of young people's disrupted personal backgrounds and attempts to resolve housing problems by staying with friends or relatives, or in other forms of unstable accommodation such as squats (Fitzpatrick, 1998, 2000). Some young people may remain 'hidden homeless' and never approach a formal homeless agency. However, if they do approach formal homelessness services, information is typically collected on the immediate reason or reasons for leaving their last accommodation (whether that accommodation is the family home, a temporary arrangement or permanent housing).

The information on these ‘triggers’ therefore explains only part of young people’s pathways into homelessness. It also does not explain why a young person is unable to secure alternative accommodation. Nonetheless, the ‘triggers’ may often represent the ‘final straw’, whereby one crisis (or one crisis too many) means that a young person moves from being in a position of housing instability to becoming homeless. This section examines these immediate or presenting reasons before considering the role of housing market factors.

### ‘Triggers’ for youth homelessness

Scotland’s HL1 statistics and data from the CLG survey represent the two most robust and extensive data sources available on triggers for homelessness across the UK. They confirm that the most common reason for young people applying as homeless to a local authority is relationship breakdown with parents or, to a much lesser extent, other relatives or friends (see Tables 15 and 16 respectively). In Scotland, parents were no longer able to accommodate in the case of 55 per cent of 16 and 17 years olds, or other relatives in 13 per cent of cases. Relationship breakdown was the main reason for homelessness for 65 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds in the CLG survey while a further 10 per cent had overstayed their welcome or could no longer be accommodated.

**Table 15 Main causes of homelessness, Scotland, 2006–07**

	Household categories (%)			Total (%)
	16–17	Parents 16–24	Lone 18–24	
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	55	15	16	19
Other relatives no longer willing or able to accommodate	13	6	10	9
Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner	7	5	10	7
Violent relationship breakdown with partner	2	21	11	14
Violence in parental home including violent relationship breakdown	1	16	10	11
Lost social rented or tied tenancy	5	7	6	6
Lost private rented sector tenancy or owner-occupied home	1	14	5	8
Discharged from prison	1	1	10	6
Harassment other than racial	1	3	2	3
Overcrowding	<1	1	<1	1
Other	15	12	19	16
Total	100	100	100	100
Base ( <i>n</i> )	2,490	9,396	12,741	24,627

Source: HL1 statistics (own analysis).

**Table 16 All reasons and main reason for homelessness, CLG survey**

	Heads of homeless families, aged 16–24s		16–17-year-old homeless young people	
	All reasons (%)	Main reason (%)	All reasons (%)	Main reason (%)
Relationship breakdown with someone lived with	40	34	70	65
Housing was overcrowded	36	26	13	10
Overstayed welcome or could no longer be accommodated	29	14	19	10
Eviction or threatened with eviction by landlord	13	9	3	2
Applying as homeless was only way to get rehoused	7	1	5	2
Problems with paying the mortgage or rent	4	2	<1	<1
Applying as homeless was quickest way to get rehoused	4	1	3	2
Tenancy came to an end	3	2	1	1
Housing was in poor condition	3	1	1	<1
Harassment, anti-social behaviour or crime	2	1	2	1
Mental or physical health problems	1	<1	2	<1
Drug or alcohol problems	<1	0	2	1
Had to leave NASS accommodation	0	0	2	1
Drug or alcohol problems	0	0	2	1
Other	12	8	6	4

Base: 789 (16–24s), 350 (16–17s).

More than one response possible for ‘all reasons’ columns.

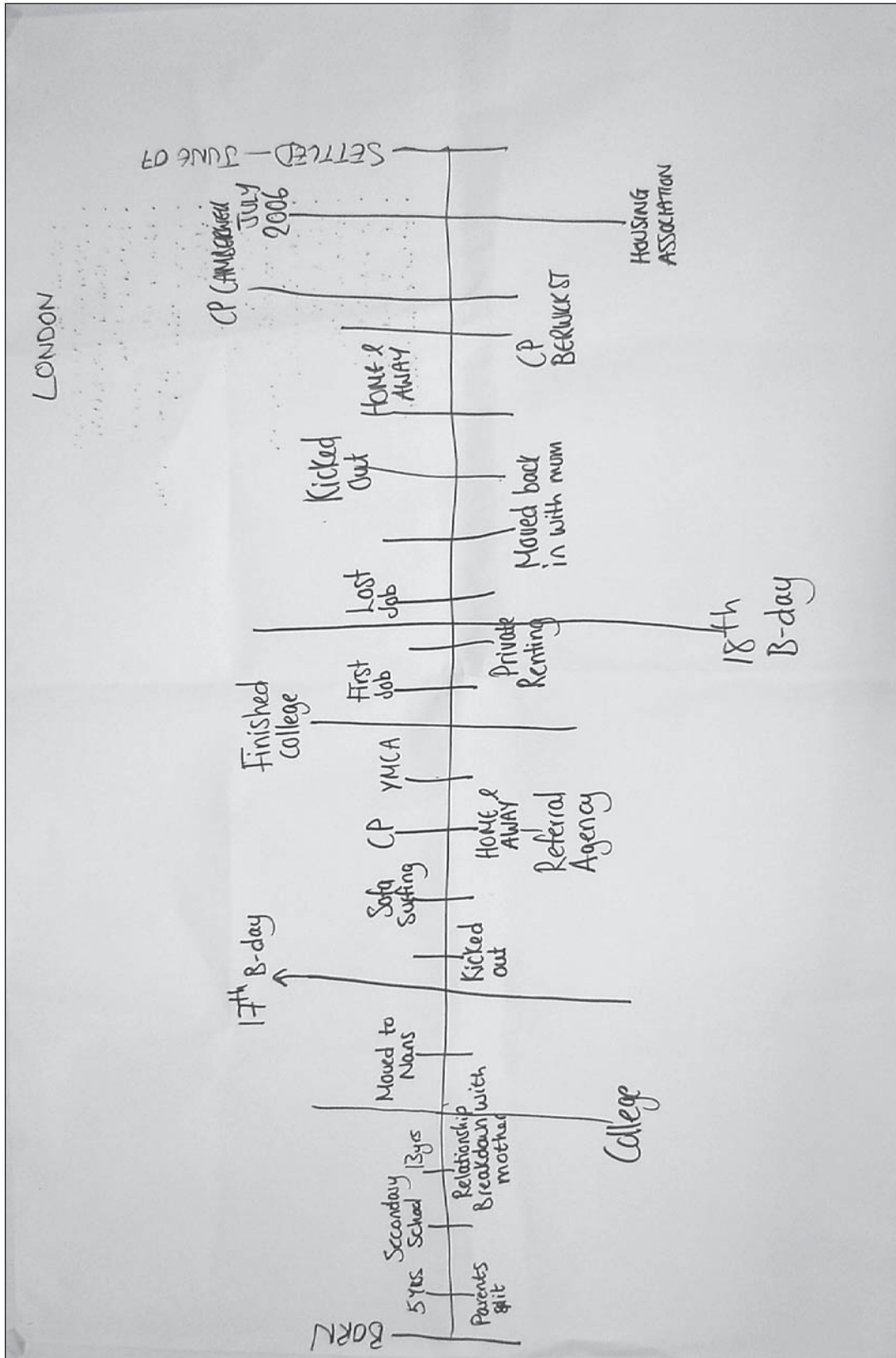
Sources: CLG survey (own reanalysis).

Relationship breakdown was also the main reason for homelessness among young parents aged between 16 and 24, but this was split much more evenly between leaving parents and leaving a partner. Violence within relationship breakdown was particularly prominent among young parents in Scotland, with 21 per cent of young parents experiencing a violent relationship breakdown and 16 per cent leaving their parental home for this reason.

Fourteen per cent of young parents became homeless as a result of losing a private sector tenancy or owner-occupied home in Scotland and 7 per cent had lost their social rented or tied housing. Eviction or being threatened with eviction by a landlord was the main reason for homelessness among one in ten (9 per cent) of young parents in the English CLG survey. Overcrowding was also the key reason for 26 per cent of this sample.



Journey 2 Young people's homelessness journeys: Example 2



Source: Young person's consultation event (see Appendix 1).

Data regarding the reasons for homelessness among single 18 to 24 year olds was only available in Scotland (Table 15). This shows that reasons for homelessness among older single homeless people were very diverse. A range of different forms of relationship breakdowns were evident (parents, partner and other relatives). One in ten had also lost a tenancy. In addition, a further one in ten had become homeless on discharge from prison.

The predominance of violence in relationship breakdown was striking. Although the Scottish data indicated that this appears lower for 16 and 17 year olds, nearly half (45 per cent) of 16 and 17 year olds in the CLG survey (for whom relationship breakdown was a cause of homelessness) stated that violence was a feature of such a breakdown.

Within the case studies, many agency representatives and young people characterised family breakdown as quite a straightforward problem of parent–teenager conflicts:

... normal teenage–parent issues – about boundaries, about keeping your room tidy, about assisting with chores, going to college, or school, or doing something after you’ve left school. (Statutory sector representative, Lambeth)

It’s silly really, I just don’t like listening to people, or taking orders. (Young person, Lambeth)

Others, however, emphasised the seriousness and long-term nature of family conflict:

Often, when young people say they’ve fallen out with family, it’s for a good reason. They’ve not just had an argument and walked out, there are real problems at home. (Voluntary sector representative, Edinburgh)

In addition, case study respondents identified parenting approaches and expectations – often borne (at least in part) from parents’ own experiences of leaving home – as explaining some of youth homelessness. In low-income households, parents often left home early and therefore assumed that this should be the case for their own children, despite the disintegration of traditional pathways into work and housing (Fitzpatrick, 2000). Accordingly, case study agencies thought that some parents felt that their duty to their children ended at 16 and that ‘corporate’ parents should take over from there if necessary. This sometimes combined with young people’s increased expectations regarding their entitlement to accommodation and independence:



People expect to have their own flat, their own furniture. Rather than perhaps ten years ago when the natural journey was one where you share a flat or house with your friends or relatives and then perhaps move onto independent housing. Now young people want everything straightaway. And that's difficult to manage. (Statutory sector representative, Swansea)

In 2002–03, analysis was conducted that explored the reasons why young people had presented as homeless in Northern Ireland (PSI Working Group on Homelessness, 2004). This research found that the main cause was what was termed 'sharing breakdown' (which is similar to relationship breakdown as reported in the other countries). Among 16–17 year olds, 54 per cent of males and 65 per cent of females presented for this reason. The figures for 18–25 year olds were 40 per cent of males and 52 per cent of females. Care leavers represented 10 per cent of 16–17 year olds presenting as homeless, but were not strongly represented among 18–25 year olds. Lack of accommodation was mentioned by 10 per cent of young women and 15 per cent of young men (PSI Working Group on Homelessness, 2004). Intimidation and neighbourhood harassment were more likely to be reported by young men (10 per cent of 16–17 year-olds and 18 per cent of 18–25 year-olds) than by young women (2 per cent of 16–17 year-olds and 9 per cent of 18–25 year-olds). This latter issue is, in large part,<sup>2</sup> particular to Northern Ireland, and was identified as a problem by a number of respondents in the Belfast case study. The issue should not be exaggerated given the significant improvements in community relations following the Northern Ireland Peace Process. Nonetheless, respondents explained that factions were active in certain communities that meant that some young people had to move out of their home area and find accommodation in alternative areas:

Every hostel I've been in, half of them's been in hostels because the paramilitary has chucked them out of their estates and they've had to move away. (Young person, Belfast)

... there are still a lot of people moving around because they have been intimidated ... the paramilitaries/vigilantes would take it on themselves to try and police the community. (Voluntary sector representative, Belfast)

### **Housing markets and youth homelessness**

A number of studies have identified housing market failure as the primary cause of youth homelessness (Anderson, 1994; Jones, 1995; Ford *et al.*, 1997). In addition, economic and social changes, including increased youth unemployment, the

withdrawal of income support from 16 and 17 year olds and reductions in the social housing stock, were all considered central to the overall growth of homelessness among young people in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Carlen, 1996; Evans, 1996; Blackman, 1998).

In all case studies, agency representatives and young people stressed the difficulties of access to affordable housing, particularly given competition for limited social housing stock, and barriers to accessing accommodation in the private rented sector (see Chapter 4). Many agency respondents commented that, in effect, the homelessness route was the only path into accommodation for young people without substantial resources available to them. This was not, however, the reason why most young people presented as homeless. For example, in the CLG survey, only 5 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds identified 'applying as homeless was the only way to get rehoused' as one of the reasons for applying as homeless.

As previously reported, young people usually come from poor backgrounds, they are disproportionately not in employment, education or training (NEET, see below) and they are also likely to have fewer family supports that could provide them with financial resources. In short, they are people on extremely limited incomes trying to compete in often very constrained and expensive housing markets.

There are loads of private houses to rent but they are always too dear.

Like £500 a month. (Young people, Belfast)

... housing availability has been reduced dramatically, which means that, when people come to the point of leaving home, of finding somewhere for themselves to live, when relationships reach the point that they are no longer tenable within a single home, they may still have a relationship but they need to have two places to do it from rather than one, it is no longer easy for that to happen. (Statutory sector representative, Edinburgh)

## **The impact of homelessness on young people**

The chapter has demonstrated that young people facing homelessness come disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds in terms of both poverty and disrupted, and often traumatised, childhoods. Evidence suggests that homelessness compounds these characteristics and experiences.

### Health impacts

Homelessness has been shown to impact negatively on some young people's sense of emotional well-being (Craig *et al.*, 1996; Commander *et al.*, 2002; Vasilou, 2006). The CLG survey revealed that the proportion of homeless 16–17 year olds with (current) mental health problems could be nearly three times that of their peers in the general population (Pleace *et al.*, 2008), and case study young people reported how the experience of homelessness contributed to poor mental health:

Homelessness can cause mental illnesses. I suffer from depression. Last night I just switched and just didn't speak and was near tears, just for no reason, just because there was all sorts going through my head. (Young person, Belfast)

I've been in and out of hostels, ended up with psychiatrists and CPN [community psychiatric nurse], seriously I have a psychiatrist so I do because of the housing, that's no joke, and from having a hard life, being in and out of hostels and not being rehoused, it's put me on the drink, and I've lost my two kids over it. (Young person, Belfast)

There is also evidence that the onset of drug use, and/or increased consumption of illicit substances, is associated with the experience of homelessness. A study of 200 young, homeless drug users in Manchester indicated that involvement in taking drugs had increased on becoming homeless and some who had previously not taken drugs had become absorbed into a drug-oriented community (Klee and Reid, 1998). In a more recent study, over half of those who used heroin and crack had first done so after becoming homeless (Wincup *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, case study young people explained:

Young person 1: Living in hostels, because you are in an environment where there are so many drugs in front of your face and you've got to try and resist all of those drugs, when you are at rock bottom the pure fact that for twelve hours a day you are sitting with nothing to do ... you will take those drugs because you are bored and it's in your face all the time.

Young person 2: It's definitely easier to get into dangerous addictions, that is for sure.

Young person 3: I got into crack last time I was in that hostel, four years ago ... It is what environment you are in that can mess you up when you are not mentally strong and really, if you are in a hostel, no one is mentally strong, everyone is weak.

Young person 1: There needs to be more drug control really, there isn't really drug control at all. (Young people, Leicester)

Case study respondents reported high levels of drug use among young homeless people. In all areas, the increasingly high level of cannabis (particularly skunk) use was reported as a worrying trend, particularly given its severe negative impact on users' mental health and self-motivation (Hall, 2006). The use of other drugs such as heroin, speed and crack cocaine appeared to be strongly influenced by regional supply; and, while intravenous drug use was reported to be decreasing in some areas, this was apparently being superseded by increased polydrug use and binge drinking:

So, whereas before we had people whose primary addiction was to one substance, the pattern of drug use now is very, very different. Intravenous heroin use is not cool ... It's much more about skunk use 24/7 but opportunistic drug use of all kinds. 'If it's available I'll have it no matter what it is. As long as I'm not banging it up I'll have it'. (Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)

### **Safety issues and risk of violence**

Research suggests that young people are highly vulnerable to sexual assault, violence and crime if they spend any time on the street (Raws, 2001), and Barrett (1997) has identified a link between running away and involvement in child prostitution. Others may commit crimes, which can range from petty theft through to involvement in the illegal sex industry – with all the attendant risks, in order to survive (Carlen, 1996; Ballantyne, 1999; Wardhaugh, 2000).

More generally, young people may feel unsafe in certain types of homeless provision, particularly hostels for all-age groups and bed and breakfast hotels. Young people reported some very worrying incidents to the researchers, as well as experiences of bullying within hostels.

Take a fucking weapon with you!

Sleep with one eye open! (Young people, Edinburgh)

Once placed in B&B, some young people get themselves involved in all sorts of undesirable lifestyles, including sexual exploitation. They're exposed to all sorts of issues that you wouldn't see as desirable for 16 and 17 year olds. (Voluntary sector representative)

It is important to note, however, that for some young people – particularly women fleeing violence – temporary accommodation such as refuges may be associated with increased feelings of safety, as they are distanced from abusive relationships (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Pleace *et al.*, 2008).

### **Economic impacts**

Young people, particularly 16–17 year olds, who experience homelessness are very susceptible to disruption to schooling, difficulties in accessing education and training, and associated problems in trying to secure work (Pleace and Quilgars, 1999; Fitzpatrick, 2000). The CLG survey found that 57 per cent of the 16–17 year olds were not in education, employment or training (NEET) at point of survey<sup>3</sup> – compared to only 11 per cent of young people the same age in England in 2005 (DfES, 2006). Even more strikingly, a total of 34 per cent had discontinued their participation in education, employment or training (and only 4 per cent entered it) since leaving their last settled accommodation (Pleace *et al.*, 2008). Notably, 37 per cent of the NEET 16–17 year olds reported that they were not in education, employment or training because of 'too much disruption due to homelessness', and 30 per cent because they 'would be worse off financially in work or on a course' (Pleace *et al.*, 2008). Also, the survey found that young people were more likely to have become NEET if they had spent more than six months in temporary accommodation – thus suggesting that longer periods of homelessness may impede young people's participation in education, training and employment.

Case study evidence supported this data as the negative impact of homelessness on young people's ability to sustain education, employment and training. Young people explained how difficult it was to undertake any form of activity because of the physical and psychological disruption associated with homelessness, the significant work disincentives associated with living in temporary accommodation and social security barriers to studying full-time while living independently (see also Chapter 4):

I had all these things on my mind at that time, when I went into [the hostel]. My manager kept on like winding me up, and so I ended up telling him to fuck his job. So he told me to go ahead and don't come back. (Young person, Edinburgh)

I'm so bored. I've worked since I was 16 until I get put here. I stopped when I got made homeless, went back for a bit recently, but stopped again because I was going to be hit by that financial assessment and have to pay all that rent. (Young person, Edinburgh)

The very low employment participation rates among homeless young people mean they are largely reliant on benefits and have very low disposable incomes, which, for most, are reduced even further by supported accommodation service charges:

It's very hard to live off. After they take your rent you're left with £40 to last you two weeks ... Or less if you're paying off a crisis loan ... Even an extra £20 would make a big difference. (Young person, Edinburgh)

Accordingly, as with NEET rates, the CLG survey of 16 and 17 year olds showed that young people's financial situation had generally worsened since leaving their last settled home (56 per cent reported this compared to 12 per cent who stated it had improved). Debt and financial exclusion is a common experience of homeless young people (Rahman and Palmer, 2001; Nandy, 2005), and many case study young people explained that their financial situation was further complicated by problems with Housing Benefit payments:

They cut off my Housing Benefit for no reason in December and wrote me a letter in March telling me that they closed my claim in December. So I had a lot of arrears ... You lose a lot of time and emotions getting yourself sorted and then they block you like that. It's so unnecessary. (Young person, Lambeth)

## **Social networks**

Research has shown that homelessness can be associated with a further fracturing of young people's social networks, as they often have to move away from their previous home area to access housing and support services (Lemos and Durkacz, 2002). These problems can be particularly acute for young people in rural areas with few homelessness services, as was the situation in one case study.

In the CLG survey, 20 per cent of the 16–17s reported that they had no one ‘to turn to for help in a crisis’ and 15 per cent had no one they ‘could really count on when you need to talk’ – figures significantly greater than those reported by young people in the general population (at 3 per cent for each) (Pleace *et al.*, 2008). However, encouragingly, a greater proportion of young people reported having support in their current accommodation than in their last settled accommodation, with the improvement for emotional support accounted for mainly by the involvement of professional support workers (Pleace *et al.*, 2008).

### **Instability, mobility and ‘life on hold’**

Homelessness, almost by definition, is associated with a lack of a stable base and this research confirmed the high mobility of young people resulting from frequent moves between the homes of friends/relatives, occasional periods of sleeping rough (particularly before accessing services) and various supported accommodation projects (see Chapters 2 and 4).

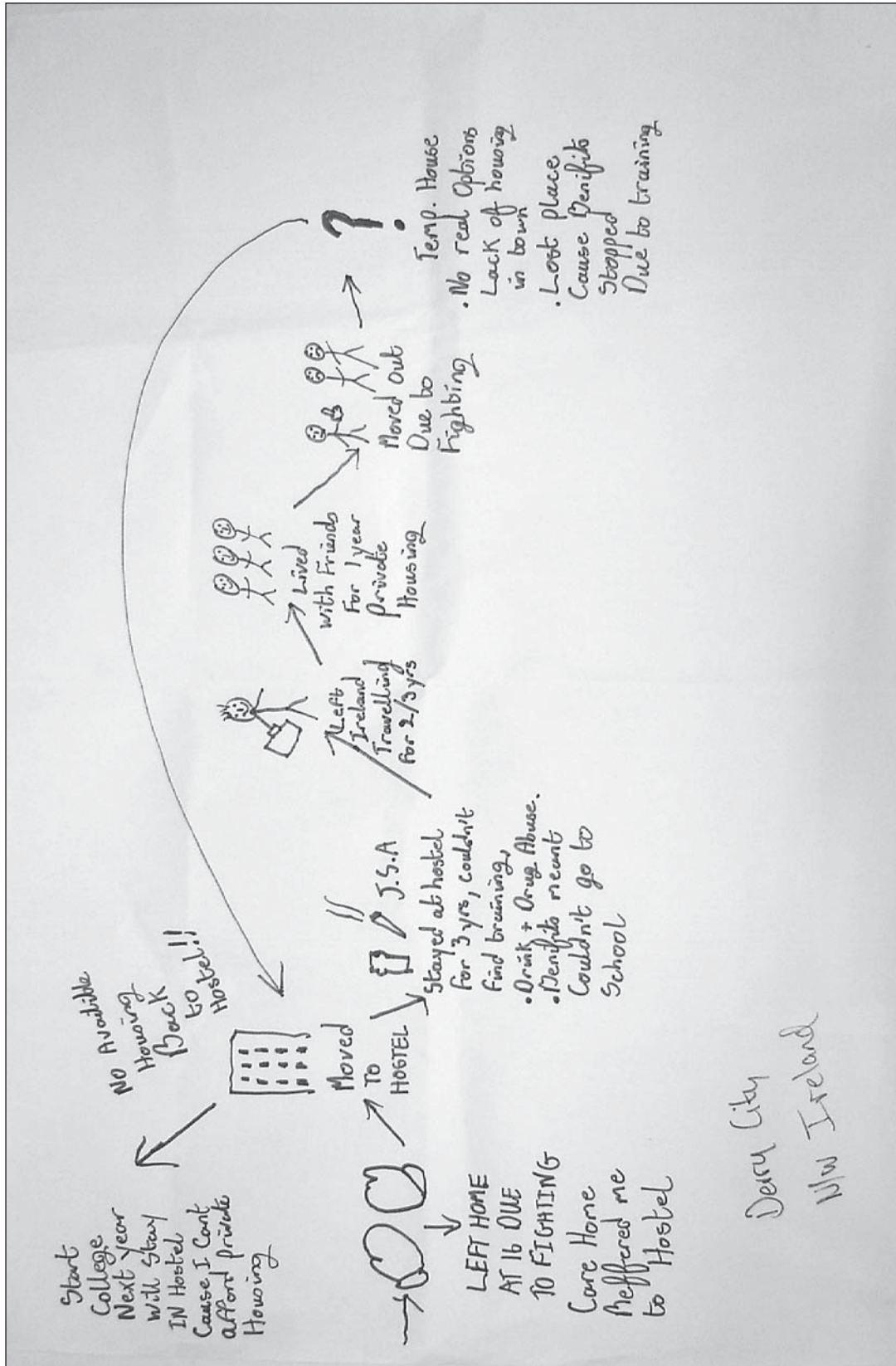
Sometimes moves are planned by providers moving young people from more to less supported environments (or vice versa), sometimes they are a result of eviction, et cetera. However, the net result is often constant change providing no base from which to lead one’s life. Young people and agencies stressed the importance of a secure setting in order for people to be able to engage with other services. Quite worryingly, some young people had spent most of their young adult life moving around the hostel ‘circuit’:

Lots of [young people] feel shunted around between friends and family, between accommodation schemes. That does nothing for their self-esteem and confidence ... You don’t know where you’re going. Nobody really wants you. (Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)

It is important to note that research has shown that young homeless families feel their life is ‘on hold’ while they are in temporary accommodation (Holder *et al.*, 2002). The CLG survey confirmed that this was true for 64 per cent of the 16–24-year-old heads of homeless families. In addition, over half (57 per cent) of 16 and 17 year olds in temporary accommodation felt that they were unable to get on with their lives in their present situation. This compared to only 18 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds, and 13 per cent of 16–24-year-old young families, who had been rehoused into settled accommodation.



Journey 3 Young people's homelessness journeys: Example 3



Source: Young person's consultation event (see Appendix 1).



### Overall impacts on quality of life

There has been little research on the overall impact of homelessness on young people's quality of life. Encouragingly, in the CLG survey, the proportion of young people reporting that life had got better since leaving their last settled accommodation (56 per cent of 16–24-year-old heads of homeless families and 52 per cent of 16–17 year olds) outweighed the proportion for whom it had got worse (16 per cent and 25 per cent respectively). This was as likely to be true for 16 and 17 year olds still in temporary accommodation as those rehoused, but 16–24-year-old heads of families were more likely to state life had improved if they had been rehoused.

Many young people emphasised the long-term benefits of the professional support they had received since becoming homeless:

I reckon it'll be really beneficial in the long term. Because I've had loads of help with budgeting my money, paying rent. I'll take that all through my life cos I'll be doing that all my life. (Young person, Edinburgh)

### Young people's homelessness journeys

As outlined in Chapter 1, young people in the consultation session were asked to chart their homelessness journey (to date). The maps of these journeys are placed throughout the report to illustrate the complexity of young people's experiences and routes into and out of (and between) different services and other aspects of their lives. Each map stands alone. Nonetheless, some themes are evident across a number of the maps, including:

- the routes of homelessness in childhood (including care);
- frequent moves between different settings;
- movements between homelessness settings and stays with family and friends;
- the intervention of a number of different agencies;
- difficulties finding good training and/or sustaining work;

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## **Pathways into, and the impact of, youth homelessness in the UK**

- limited housing options, but;
- some positive outcomes at point of the youth consultation.<sup>4</sup>

## 4 Service provision for young homeless people

### Key points

- Policy and legislative changes had led to a welcome sea change (most evident in England) in the way that young homeless people were assessed and referred to accommodation and/or other support services.
- Young people did, nevertheless, continue to find the experience of homelessness assessment intimidating, and commonly reported feeling confused, misunderstood and/or powerless when navigating the homelessness 'system'.
- The provision of preventative services – particularly family mediation – had expanded significantly in recent years, but evidence suggested that there was significant scope for further development of earlier 'pre-crisis' interventions, especially additional support for the parents of young people.
- Family mediation practice varied considerably and concerns about gatekeeping were shown to have some grounding in reality. There was a tension between the aims and dictates of some local authorities and the objectives of most mediation practitioners.
- A range of (often specialist) models of temporary accommodation for young people existed in most (urban) areas, but pressure on provision (exacerbated by lack of move-on housing) dictated that referrals were often capacity- rather than needs-driven. There was also a lack of clarity regarding whether such accommodation should be viewed as 'temporary' or (more deliberately) 'transitional' provision.
- The push for the expansion of supported lodgings provision was largely welcomed, but the effectiveness of this model had yet to be systematically evaluated.
- Shortages of social housing were acute in many areas, necessitating often very lengthy stays in temporary accommodation, which, in turn, had a negative effect on some young people's motivation and psychological well-being.

- This being so, support providers were increasingly developing (often very innovative) strategies to facilitate young people's access to the private rented sector, but identified a number of barriers to, and concerns about, doing so (most especially the creation of a 'poverty trap' and/or long-term benefit dependency).
- Floating support schemes were well established and deemed to be highly effective in improving tenancy sustainment, but providers were increasingly seeking to complement these by (re)building young people's social support networks (promoting mentoring and befriending schemes in particular).
- The availability of treatment for diagnosable mental health problems was said to have improved, but gaps remained for young people with 'low-level' mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.
- Provision for substance misuse had also improved, but had not evolved in concert with young people's changing drug-use patterns, such that little was available for young people dependent on cannabis and/or alcohol.
- Similarly, provision supporting young people into education, employment and training had improved significantly, but major barriers – caused by a discord between the goals of employability initiatives and the welfare benefit system – severely impeded young people's participation.
- The success of all forms of provision was widely agreed to depend to a significant degree on the quality of individual project staff and their relationship with young people.

## Introduction

This chapter examines the range of service provision in place in the UK to respond to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The chapter draws heavily on the case study work, as well as broader literature, to reflect on current and emerging practice. As far as the evidence allows, the effectiveness of different types of provision is reviewed.

The chapter provides an overview of local authorities' responses to legislative and policy change, before considering five main areas of service provision: preventative services; temporary/transitional accommodation; independent housing with support; health services; and education, employment and training services.

## Local authority responses to youth homelessness: a new approach?

As Chapter 1 notes, the legislative and policy context within which services are provided to young homeless people has altered significantly over the past five or so years. Most notably, the welfare net for vulnerable young people has been strengthened via the expansion of priority need groups in three of the four countries and the active promotion of homelessness prevention at the national level, particularly in England.

Although there could be said to be an inherent tension between these two strands of legislation and policy (with one increasing councils' statutory duties towards homeless young people and the other introducing targets to reduce numbers accepted as homeless), the case studies indicated that local authorities and support providers have, almost without exception, embraced the ethos underpinning both. As a consequence, there has been a significant cultural shift in the way that housing officers and support providers view youth homelessness, evidenced by an increasing consensus that 'going homeless' (that is, being accepted as statutorily homeless) is neither an 'inevitable', nor necessarily the 'best', outcome for many young people. This cultural shift has, in turn, led to fundamental changes in the way that young people are dealt with when they approach the council for help:

When someone comes into us, we do an assessment on their housing need ... and then identify the right options for that person ... Homelessness is a last resort now, it's only at the end if there is nothing else we can do that we can go down the statutory route with them. So it's been trying to re-educate ourselves as well and change this whole process and to incorporate the housing advice and stuff within it all. (Statutory sector representative, Sedgefield)

This time two years ago we were very assessment focused, it was all about making the decision, which didn't leave a lot of time or opportunity to prevent homelessness. What we've done is change that focus from assessment to prevention. None of this is particularly new or innovative – it's stuff that's being done all over the country – but it was a big cultural change for our organisation because we were very much set up to assess homelessness. (Statutory sector representative, Swansea)

This sea change in practice has been articulated in a range of different ways. In some case study areas, housing options interviews were conducted prior to, and deemed operationally distinct from, formal homelessness assessments. Some of the

local authorities had expanded staff teams and were actively encouraging housing officers to spend more time assessing the needs of, and identifying the full range of options available to, individual young people. Others had developed dedicated young people's officer posts specifically for this purpose. One council had contracted out the assessment of all 16–21 year olds to a voluntary sector organisation, which provided specialist advice from dedicated young people's workers (including representatives from housing and social work) on a single site (see Box 5). One local authority conducted mandatory home visits in the case of all family and friend exclusions. Another had developed a service to negotiate that 16 and 17 year olds returned or remained at home, where appropriate, if they were not deemed to be in genuine 'housing crisis' – that is, when:

... they want to leave because they want their own independence, they want their own space. There are issues in their homes, there's a lack of understanding, tension within the home. But they are not homeless. They've got their room at home and everything else ... That's what we've had to re-educate young people about – that the homelessness legislation is there as a safety net, to protect people who are in housing crisis, and 'you are not homeless, you are not threatened with homelessness, you just have a desire to move out'. That's not what the housing legislation is there for. (Statutory sector representative, Lambeth)

### **Box 5 Specialist assessment: Swansea's BAYS project**

The BAYS – a partnership between the City and County of Swansea Council (Housing and Social Services departments) and Barnardo's – conducts the assessments of all homeless 16–21 year olds without dependent children in Swansea.

Given that all homeless 16 and 17 year olds are deemed to be children in need under childcare legislation in Swansea, they receive a joint social work and housing assessment (conducted by a social worker).

Young people aged 18–21 are assessed by specialist seconded workers from Housing Options who have detailed knowledge of the legislation pertaining to, and services available for, young people, as well as an ability to relate to this age group in an understanding manner.

The BAYS also offers advice and support (including provision of a Young Person's Adviser) to all care leavers aged 16 to 21 and a supported lodgings scheme, and it is increasing links with schools to prevent youth homelessness.

Homelessness-prevention initiatives, particularly mediation and schools-based education programmes, had been developed or expanded in all case study areas – and these are discussed in more detail below.

These new approaches had been pursued most proactively in England (Pawson, 2007). Accordingly, the Sedgefield, Leicester and Lambeth case studies reported substantial reductions in numbers of young people accepted as homeless (see Appendix 2). This was not the case in Edinburgh and Belfast.

Support providers regarded attempts to divert young people from the statutory homeless route via enhanced consideration of alternative options as presenting a number of advantages, in particular: avoidance of labelling young people (given the stigma commonly associated with homelessness); avoidance of constraining young people's housing (and wider) aspirations; and minimisation of the likelihood of young people becoming integrated in a potentially damaging homeless 'culture':

If you raise aspirations, then they don't think that 'my goal is a council flat'.  
(Statutory sector representative, Lambeth)

The homelessness scene ... can be very destructive. (Statutory sector representative, Edinburgh)

These positive appraisals were, however, paralleled by two equally pervasive concerns. First, service providers expressed a fear that some young people might be encouraged (or forced) to remain at or return home when it was not safe for them to do so:

Some people seem to think that all homelessness is preventable. It's not. There're some situations where the risk is so high that you cannot work with it. You just have to take the person out of the situation. (Statutory sector representative, Swansea)

Second, they were concerned that, if young people (particularly 16 or 17 year olds) were diverted away from the statutory homeless route, they might 'miss the boat' in terms of their legal entitlement to settled housing:

That's the vital time, if they're going to get housing, because after that they won't be deemed as a priority. (Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)

Turning to consider young people's experiences of service access within this changing context, there is strong evidence to indicate that the concerns and frustrations associated with approaching local authorities for help documented previously (ODPM, 2003; Anderson and Thomson, 2005) continue to be true for most young people. The CLG survey, for example, revealed that 70 per cent of 16–24-year-old heads of homeless families, and 64 per cent of 16–17 year olds, reported at least one of a number of specified concerns about the process – most commonly that they would have to live in a 'rough' area (a specific concern reported by 40 per cent of heads of homeless families aged 16–24 and 32 per cent of 16–17s). Furthermore, while some of the case study and consultation young people felt that they had been dealt with efficiently and sympathetically, the majority reported having had to make several repeat visits to their local Housing Options/Executive office (typically repeating their 'story' to a different member of staff on each occasion), feeling 'fobbed off' and/or passed from pillar to post:

They just pass you on from company to company so in the end you just give up and say 'fuck it'. (Young person, Swansea)

[They] say they'll get back in touch with you but never do. (Young person, Swansea)

Young people often had difficulty understanding the terminology used, lacked the resources and skills necessary to pursue the course of action advised by housing officers, or felt that the legitimacy of their request for help was held in doubt because of their age:

[Housing Options] are not actually giving them the time and energy that they need ... Young people often lose their temper because they don't understand the terms that are being used, or the fact that you're not a priority ... [Housing Options] just say 'you've got to contact ...' But how are they supposed to do that, when they've got no phone, no access to anywhere, or they can't complete forms without some support and understanding? (Statutory sector representative, Leicester)

Lots of our young people tell us that they get treated like shit when they go to the council. You know, 'go back to your mum', blah de blah de blah. Which is how domestic violence cases were treated in the 1960s and 1970s. Now nobody in the council would say to a woman, 'Oh go back to your husband'. (Support worker, youth consultation event)



Feelings of frustration and powerlessness were particularly acute for non-priority 18–24 year olds, some of whom admitted to ‘stretching the truth’ in a desperate attempt to increase their eligibility for services:

This system, you can’t be honest ... I’ve told a few white lies and then I get help, in’nt. You don’t want to like, but you have to, to get help. (Young person, Leicester)

Some interviewees reported that it was not uncommon for young people to be ‘coached’ in how to emphasise their vulnerabilities to increase their eligibility for services:

I certainly know of situations when young people are coached about what to say by agencies in order to get into services. ‘You need to say this, this and this and make a big deal out of that in order to get in’. (Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)

Given their experiences, young people called for more widespread provision of dedicated housing officers who are trained to understand their specific needs. The value of having a ‘one-stop shop’ for advice and assessments was also consistently emphasised in case studies and the consultation exercises. This, they felt, would obviate the need to attend appointments at multiple agencies, thereby minimising the potential for young people to fall through ‘gaps’ in the system and/or suffer a significant drop in motivation.

### **Early intervention services**

Given that relationship breakdown with parents is the predominant reason for youth homelessness in the UK (see Chapter 2), it is not surprising that early intervention services in the case study areas focused primarily on young people living in the parental home. Two main types were in place: family mediation and school-based education programmes. These are discussed below, before gaps in early intervention initiatives are considered.

## Family mediation

Family mediation schemes existed in all of the case study areas. The structure and nature of provision varied considerably: most services were outsourced, but some were provided in house by councils; many were tightly integrated with housing options interviews, others accepted referrals from external agencies; some were dependent on willing engagement of all parties, others not; some were limited to 16 and 17 year olds, while others were open to a wider age range; and some were tightly time limited, while others included extended post-mediation support packages (see Box 6).

### **Box 6 Different approaches to prevention: Edinburgh's Amber project and Lambeth's Family Support Service and 'Time-out' accommodation**

#### *Amber project (Edinburgh)*

The Amber project is a pilot mediation service (in its early stages of operation), provided by Cyrenians together with SACRO for young people aged 14–24 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Edinburgh. When a young person is referred (by the council, other agencies, or self-referral), the support co-ordinator meets with them to conduct an initial assessment and ensure that the young person understands what mediation involves, etc.

If the young person and their parent(s) both agree to pursue mediation, an impartial specialist mediator meets both individually (sometimes on several occasions), before arranging a face-to-face meeting with both parties. In this, the mediator helps young people and their families to 'hold a difficult conversation' and supports them to come to an agreement about how they might improve their relationship.

The service is usually provided for approximately six to eight weeks on average. Importantly, interventions are regarded as 'successful' if a young person decides to return to (or remain in) the parental home, or moves out but does so in a planned way with the ongoing support of their family.

*(Continued)*

### *Family Support Service and 'Time-out' accommodation (Lambeth)*

In Lambeth, the council's in-house Family Support Service offers a crisis intervention and conflict resolution service, which aims to negotiate a way home for 16 and 17 year olds who have left, or are being excluded from, the parental home. All 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless are referred to the service.

Approximately one-third (35 per cent) of the 457 cases referred to the service between January and October 2007 went on to make a homeless application. Young people and their families are referred to an external agency for longer-term mediation where necessary.

This will soon be accompanied by 'Time-out' accommodation – provided by Look Ahead in partnership with Alone in London – which will offer a safe space for 16 and 17 year olds to undergo a 'cooling off' period (of a maximum eight weeks), during which a support needs assessment will be conducted and family mediation offered. This service will aim to reunite young people with their families and facilitate a return home where appropriate.

Perhaps most notable, however, were variations in the aims and intended outcomes of schemes. In some places, practitioners commended their local authority for giving a planned move from the family home and improved family relations equal weighting in their definitions of a successful outcome as they did a young person's returning or remaining at home. Yet, and confirming fears expressed elsewhere regarding the potential for mediation to be used as a 'gatekeeping' tool (e.g. Citizens Advice, 2004; Hawkey, 2004; Pawson, 2007), some providers (working across more than one jurisdiction) reported having turned down tender opportunities because the local authorities concerned were setting unrealistic 'return/remain home' targets and imposing overly severe restrictions on the intensity and longevity of support to be provided to young people:

[For some local authorities] their agenda is to get them [16 and 17 year olds] back home ... so that they can keep down the costs of rehousing young people ... They wanted us ... to do gatekeeping for them, and I said 'no we won't do that'. (Voluntary sector representative)

While service providers believed without exception that mediation should always be available to young people, they emphasised that it will be unlikely to work, and should certainly never be 'forced', in cases of parental substance misuse or mental health problems – thus corroborating the argument of Lemos (2001). It is crucial that effective risk assessments are carried out when considering the use of a mediation service to ensure that a young person is not put at risk. Providers also asserted that an important distinction needed to be made between independently delivered mediation services and more general support or 'negotiation' between parties undertaken by housing officers during home visits:

I would argue that what they do is a lot of negotiation ... I don't think they can do mediation because of their role ... a housing officer [has] a vested interest in the outcome. (Voluntary sector representative, Sedgefield)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the variation in practice described above, the proportion of young people returning or remaining home as a result of family mediation schemes varies considerably (Pawson, 2007), with the Association of London Government (2005), for example, citing success rates ranging between 38 and 96 per cent in different London boroughs. Case study support providers emphasised the need to monitor outcomes in the long term, even where 'hard' indicators suggest that mediation has been successful:

What's happening is young people are being returned home, but for how long? ... In reality, if there's been 16 years of abuse or neglect or whichever level in terms of child protection, that's not going to be turned around by a couple of workers negotiating you going home. It might last for a while, but could be putting off the inevitable. That needs to be monitored. (Voluntary sector representative, Swansea)

Very few young people in the focus groups and consultation exercise had experienced family mediation personally and, while a significant minority thought that it 'might have helped' had it been offered, a far greater proportion were dubious about the service's potential utility. Their caution was founded on a range of factors, most commonly: perceived awkwardness of involving third parties in personal disputes; fear that their parents would resent the intervention and react very negatively (potentially violently); fear that parents would manipulate the mediator or young person; and concern that engaging with the service might restrict their entitlement to other services (particularly housing):

Your problems are personal, you don't want people sat there. You'd think they were judging you really. (Young person, Sedgefield)

Talking to my Mum would be the worst possible thing anyone could do to me! ... [She] will be all nice until that person leaves, 'Yeah, thanks very much for your help', then the second they leave I'll get a black eye for it. (Young person, Lambeth)

Adults can manipulate a lot more and make youngsters say stuff, or not say stuff. You're down here and the adults are up here ... There's too much difference in age and power and stuff. (Young person, Edinburgh)

It is clear that family mediation needs to be developed with sensitivity and careful attention to service aims and outcomes in order to respond to young people's concerns. Its potential for providing a useful service also seems clear, though it will not be suitable for all young people's situations (Quilgars *et al.*, 2004). Agencies attending the consultation process felt that schemes also highlighted the need for a greater focus to be placed on building family relationships in future service developments more generally.

### **Educational programmes**

Most of the case studies operated educational programmes aimed at raising awareness of homelessness and related issues. These were normally taught as part of the personal social and health education (PSHE) or equivalent curriculum, although some providers had expanded into other youth work programmes.

Case study practitioners and council representatives agreed that such programmes provide a means to:

- increase young people's awareness of the 'harsh realities' of homelessness and dispel myths about the availability of social housing;
- challenge stereotypes about homeless people, particularly regarding their culpability;
- educate young people about the range of housing options available to them after leaving home and raise awareness of help available;
- emphasise young people's responsibilities with regard to housing;
- teach conflict resolution skills that may be applied within and beyond the home and school.

Support providers and young people alike consistently emphasised the added benefit of utilising peer educators:

Peer education is a massively valuable tool ... allowing advice and information to go to young people in a manner that they're going to take it up. It brings credibility. Young people want to hear from other young people who've been through similar experiences. (Voluntary sector representative, Edinburgh)

Individual case study project evaluations indicate that peer-education schemes have, on the whole, been very well received by students and teachers alike. Young people's focus group participants agreed almost unanimously that such programmes were a 'good idea', but often warned that such schemes will not benefit young people universally – partly because of poor school attendance of many of the most vulnerable and because some will fail to see the relevance to them at the time:

They did teach me a lot of it [at school]. But I weren't listening because it weren't important to me because I wasn't there in that situation. (Young person, Lambeth)

While it is too early to ascertain the long-term outcomes of educational programmes – particularly regarding their impact on the scale of youth homelessness – stakeholders were confident that the overall outcomes for young people would almost certainly be positive:

What will happen, those young people who would become homeless anyway will have better knowledge of how to access services. And those young people who were thinking 'that sounds like a cushy number' will have some of those myths dispelled. (Voluntary sector representative, Swansea)

### **Taking early intervention forward: gaps in prevention work**

Enhanced provision of family mediation and educational programmes were, as noted above, heralded as welcome developments in the case studies and consultation events. However, interviewees highlighted a need for greater consideration of, and/or investment in, three areas.

First, they called for the earlier identification of children and young people exhibiting 'risk factors' (see Chapter 3) – that is, potential susceptibility to homelessness and/

or other forms of social exclusion – and for provision of intensive targeted support for these young people and their families. Providers acknowledge that this would require effective inter-agency working between a range of agencies, including, but by no means limited to, social services, housing departments and schools. Previous research of initiatives such as Safe Moves and Safe in the City (Safe in the City, 2002; Dickens and Woodfield, 2004; Quilgars *et al.*, 2004) has shown that this is difficult, but not impossible, to achieve:

We're limited in terms of what we can do by way of prevention, because our duty starts at 16 ... We recognise that a lot of the problems start earlier. (Statutory sector representative, Lambeth)

Second, the case studies highlighted a need for support services for parents of teenagers – as noted earlier in Smith and Ravenhill (2006) and Smith and Browne (2007) – particularly around parenting skills to help them set realistic boundaries, manage difficult behaviour and/or deal with conflict in the home:

A lot of the young people's parents haven't got the parenting skills, and don't necessarily have the support themselves. (Voluntary sector representative, Leicester)

Third, the need to consider broader structural issues more explicitly was commonly emphasised:

Prevention for me is really about promoting routes into housing ... if we can find sufficient opportunities for people to move earlier on before that crisis happens, then it is not a homelessness issue at all, it's a rehousing issue ... What you want is for people to make that transition in their life that does not require them going down the homeless route. (Statutory sector representative, Edinburgh)

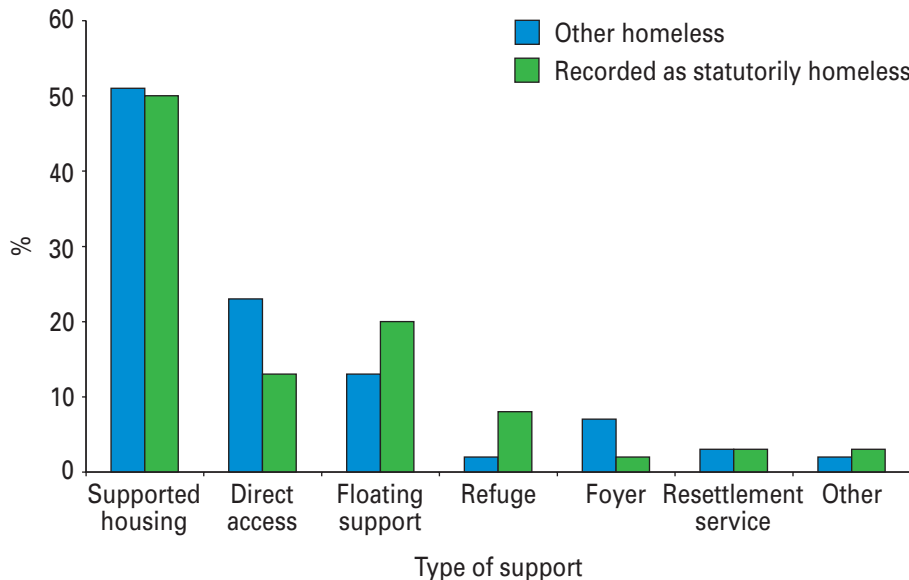
This being so, interviewees were often critical of the fact that potential preventative measures such as rent deposit schemes are rarely available to young people (see below), and even then are offered only when young people are preparing to move from temporary/transitional accommodation into settled housing. Ultimately, participants were calling for a less 'reactionary' approach to prevention, with greater emphasis on increasing the availability of affordable housing and support for young people moving from the family home, thus minimising the need for young people to navigate the homelessness 'system' at all.

Finally, there was also a recognition that a balance needed to be retained between the provision of prevention and crisis intervention. While the former was absolutely critical for the future, there would always be a need for effective crisis provision at the local level.

### Temporary/transitional accommodation

Prior to the implementation of Supporting People, the majority of provision for young people in housing need in both urban and rural areas was various types of supported housing (Ford *et al.*, 1997; Quilgars and Pleace, 1999), and the CLG survey indicated that 47 per cent of young people accepted as homeless 16–17 year olds had experienced some form of supported accommodation since approaching the council for help. Supporting People has led to significant developments in floating support. However, SPCR data (see Chapter 2) for England shows that just over half of all interventions<sup>1</sup> for homeless young people involved the provision of supported housing in 2005–06. A further 23 per cent of interventions for non-statutorily homeless young people were direct access accommodation (as were 13 per cent of statutory interventions) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3 Types of Supporting People service interventions with young homeless people in 2005–06**



Source: Supporting People Client Record for England.



There is considerable diversity within provision of temporary or transitional accommodation for homeless people (Neale, 1996; van Doorn, 2001; Humphreys *et al.*, 2007; Briheim-Crookall *et al.*, 2008). Recently, Humphreys *et al.* (2007) appraised the whole range of models of transitional accommodation available to young people in the UK. They identified 21 different models of accommodation and support, falling into five main categories differentiated by primary aims, intended length of stay, level of support and spatial arrangement of service delivery (e.g. whether dispersed or single site). Here, we review the main types of (statutory and non-statutory) provision in operation or development in the case study authorities, drawing on key literature where available as to their effectiveness.

### **Bed and breakfast hotels (B&Bs)**

The experience of B&B remains widespread among young homeless people. The CLG survey indicated that more than one-quarter (28 per cent) of 16–17 year olds, and 12 per cent of 16–24-year-old heads of homeless families, reported that they had stayed in a B&B hotel since applying as homeless, and many focus group participants had stayed in a B&B for at least a few nights – sometimes several months.

Recent targets for the reduction in B&B use (see Chapter 1) had been welcomed by service providers and local authority representatives alike, given ongoing concerns about previously documented problems with this type of provision including the lack of support available, the risk of exploitation, disruption to education, lack of cooking facilities, out-of-area placements, et cetera. (Pleace and Quilgars, 1996; Centrepoint, 2005; NCH, 2007). Many, however, were concerned that such targets are unrealistic given the lack of alternative emergency accommodation available.

Young people in the case studies confirmed many of the known problems with B&Bs, particularly around safety issues both from other residents and the location of provision (particularly where it necessitated a move from a rural area to a large city). Small and local B&B provision was reported as less problematic in one area. Other commentators have suggested that B&B can in some circumstances be preferable to general hostel provision (Humphreys *et al.*, 2007). However, this was very much a minority view among case study interviewees.

## Hostels and other supported accommodation

Three main types of hostel/supported accommodation have been identified: emergency, direct-access provision; referral-based hostel services providing short- or medium-stay accommodation and support for preparation with independent living; and transitional housing services where support is tied to specific general needs accommodation (e.g. second-stage or move-on housing) (Pleace and Quilgars, 2003).

Within a number of the case studies, a particular gap had been identified for emergency hostel accommodation for young people. In one case study, an all-age group hostel had recently been converted to specialist young people's provision and another had the development of such a scheme included in its Supporting People Plan. In contrast, referral-based hostels for young people were already well established in the case studies, most usually provided within the voluntary sector. These often also provided some supported second-stage housing on the same site or nearby.

The case studies confirmed accepted wisdom that specialist provision for young people is better than generic hostel provision, being able to offer safer environments and tailor services to their needs given young people's relative inexperience of living independently (Jones, 1997). In Leicester, reconfiguration of provision had been prompted by concerns for the welfare of young people who previously had to share hostels with older homeless people who quite often had more extreme needs, including histories of drug abuse or violence.

Debate remains, however, regarding whether young people with high/complex support needs (e.g. drug misuse issues) are best catered for in specialist accommodation or whether they should be integrated into mainstream shared provision (Humphreys *et al.*, 2007). Smaller units with higher staffing ratios were unanimously considered more effective than larger, less supportive units.

Effective services tend to offer appropriate life-skills training for young people (Jones *et al.*, 2001). Front-line staff consistently emphasised the importance of ensuring that young people possess the practical skills required to sustain a tenancy before being rehoused and frequently highlighted the value of formal pre-tenancy training programmes (for example, as recently developed in Leicester) and provision of user-friendly information packs (e.g. SCSH, 2005) in aiding this process.

Case study young people confirmed the recent CLG survey finding (Pleace *et al.*, 2008) that hostels and supported accommodation present mixed blessings – highlighting the downsides of living with other people and perceived restrictive rules of provision, but also appreciating the company of other residents and valuing the support provided by key workers. Other research, also confirmed by the case studies, concludes that the effectiveness of a wide range of support services hinges on the quality of the relationship established between service users and key workers (Quilgars, 2000; Social Exclusion Unit, 2005).

The vast majority of supported temporary/transitional accommodation schemes in the case study areas catered for single young people without dependent children. Some did, however, offer specialist units for young mothers and babies/toddlers. The support given within such units was, for the most part, valued by the residents. The young mothers were particularly appreciative of the security and parenting support provided, and peer support from fellow residents. Some were nevertheless frustrated by the perceived strict rules in some areas, including that fathers of their children were excluded from some projects outside of official visiting hours:

You almost have to pretend that your child doesn't even have a dad ... They can come and visit but they have to leave by ten ... So, when you've got a newborn screaming through the night and you're stuck here on your own when there's a father around the corner that is perfectly able and willing to support you, but you can't have the support ... There's nothing where you can be together. (Young person, Lambeth)

Several support providers and local authority representatives acknowledged that this was an area that requires further consideration in service and strategy development. This finding, when combined with the discovery that 28 per cent of the young male residents in a recent survey of Birmingham hostels had children (Smith, 2000), suggests that the needs of young homeless fathers warrant greater attention than has been received to date.

### Foyers

Foyers are now a significant feature of the UK response to the housing and other support needs of young people, growing from approximately 35 schemes in 1995 to over 130 in 2007, and supporting more than 10,000 young people each year. Foyers were in operation in the Swansea, Lambeth and Belfast case studies.

The original foyer model in the UK aimed to provide high-quality, hostel-type accommodation with on-site services to assist young people with low support needs with access to education, training and employment services. Provision has developed to respond to local need, with smaller/rural/dispersed models being created (Streich and Greene, 1998; Quilgars, 2001) and a varied client base including those with higher needs (Quilgars and Anderson, 1997; Lovatt with Whitehead, 2006). In one case study, temporary accommodation shortages – exacerbated by targets for reducing bed and breakfast use – had meant that the local foyer was now catering for young people with more complex needs.

In the case study localities, foyers appeared quite popular with young people because of the good standard of accommodation and relatively relaxed but supportive regimes. Recent research has indicated that foyers are usually 'fit for purpose' (Lovatt with Whitehead, 2006). However, their role continues to be controversial (see Allen, 2001) at a local level with some agency representatives pointing out the disadvantages associated with large hostels and specialist support tied to bricks and mortar. Monitoring of outcomes, while often better than monitoring procedures in other hostels and supported accommodation, remains limited. Nonetheless, some successes have been reported, including move on to independent living/tenancy sustainment for some residents (especially women) within the social housing sector, and increases in residents' participation in employment, education and training (Maginn *et al.*, 2000; Smith and Browne, 2007).

### **Supported lodgings**

Supported lodgings schemes have not been subject to systematic evaluation to date, but, given their recent promotion at the national strategy level (see Chapter 1), almost all case study areas were in the process of expanding, or planned to develop, such provision – often via expansion of existing provision for care leavers and sometimes via the creation of new innovative pilot projects available to other young people (see Box 7).

### **Box 7 Remodelling supported lodgings: Lambeth's Community Host scheme**

At the time of writing, South London YMCA and London Borough of Lambeth Council were developing a pilot Community Host scheme for 16 and 17 year olds with a black ethnic background.

A YMCA Step-in project initiative, which is part-funded by Communities and Local Government, the scheme will aim to place 15 young people in its first year of operation.

Based on the supported lodgings model, the scheme has the objective of developing a community-based response to the over-representation of black young people entering local authority homelessness provision.

It will aim to provide safe, secure and stable accommodation with vetted and trained host families or individuals who will support black young people to make the transition to independence, and encourage them to take advantage of education, training and employment opportunities.

It is intended that young people will either move into their own tenancy or return to the family home after a placement of between eight weeks and two years.

Case study service providers were enthusiastic about this form of provision and able to cite examples of successful outcomes for individual clients:

I've had a lot of positive experience with that, it's brilliant ... At its very, very best it's like a family ... Some of the ... people we've had in there have really blossomed or benefited from it. (Statutory sector representative, Edinburgh)

Only one in ten (11 per cent) of the 16–17 year olds in the CLG survey had ever lived in a supported lodgings arrangement and few of the case study focus group participants had personal experience of it. Notably, only a small minority thought that the model was a 'good idea' and would have been likely to benefit them personally:

I didn't know it existed, I kind of wished that option was told to me when I was homeless ... I wasn't that kind of independent when I was that age, I would have preferred a family environment, compared to going through what I had to go through in the hostels. (Young person, Belfast)

The greater majority were sceptical about the potential utility of such a scheme. Their scepticism was most commonly grounded in the perceived potential awkwardness of such an arrangement, doubt that it could ‘work’ when they had already ‘failed’ to maintain positive relationships within their own family and/or concerns about personal safety:

I wouldn’t have liked it because I would have been imposing on another family. I would have said no if they’d offered that. (Young person, Swansea)

It’d be a pretty strange, awkward situation, staying with a family you don’t know, You’re in a family home, but you’ve just come from one. So it’d be rubbing it in your face a bit. (Young person, Edinburgh)

I couldn’t follow rules in my Ma’s house, so why would I want to follow rules of people who aren’t even my parents? (Young person, Belfast)

You can’t guarantee that no one’s going to come in in the middle of the night. The council have been placing people in foster homes for years and getting it very wrong, with sexual abuse and that. (Young person, Edinburgh)

Experiences of recruiting host families in case studies had been very mixed – some finding it relatively ‘easy’, others very difficult. Service providers emphasised the need for host pay to be commensurate with that of foster carers (see also Humphreys *et al.*, 2007), and of the need for hosts to be provided with adequate support, but cautioned against its use with young people with high and/or complex support needs. They also highlighted the need for rigorous vetting and monitoring procedures, which was particularly salient given some young people’s accounts of their experiences in supported lodgings:

We never see her, the woman who lives with us. She’s never there.

They just let me get on with my own thing. I would go out and wouldn’t come back for like weeks later, or a month. (Young people)

### Overall role of transitional accommodation

Case study providers and statutory sector representatives consistently emphasised the importance of having a range of temporary accommodation provision to cater for differing levels of need and, ideally, to give young people an element of choice in provision. While strategic 'tiering' of support makes sense theoretically, it is clear that, despite the concerted efforts of service providers to refer young people to the most suitable projects, constraints of provision dictate that, in practice, referrals tend to be driven by *capacity* rather than need. Significant mismatches between need and provision, such as that described by a young woman who wanted to return to work after having a child, were not uncommon:

I don't want support! But you have no choice, you have to take the support ... And, if I want to go back to work full-time now, I have to pay £710 for one room each month. £710! ... Places like this should be reserved for people that really really need the support, not people like me.  
(Young person, Lambeth)

Furthermore, frequent moves from project to project as more 'suitable' spaces become available are seriously destabilising for young people:

You hear dreadful stories of a young person coming out of a residential unit, going into a B&B for like a week, then moving on somewhere else, and somewhere else ... That doesn't do them any good. They've already got a picture of the world where relationships don't last. They need to be moved into somewhere where they can begin to build relationships.  
(Voluntary sector representative, Edinburgh)

While the value of supported transitional accommodation enabling young people to develop independent living skills was consistently emphasised, providers expressed serious concerns about the impact of overly prolonged stays on young people's motivation and ability to 'move forward in life'. The lack of move-on accommodation has been recognised at the national level (Social Exclusion Unit, 2005). A number of case studies were developing, or had developed, move-on strategies. For example, in Leicester, an interim strategy included policies such as awarding points to those who had been living in hostels successfully for three months and challenging anti-social behaviour orders where behaviour had changed. However, overall, move-on opportunities remained an ongoing problem:



I think long-term stays in hostels are quite destructive for people, because it is very hard to get a job or to get into education, just to get established really. And they are mixing with other people with similar difficulties getting into a whole sort of cycle of dysfunctional relationships. (Voluntary sector representative, Belfast)

There's very little move-on accommodation. We've probably got half a dozen young people sitting waiting. They don't need the support any more and the longer they sit the more despondent they get. (Voluntary sector representative, Leicester)

The inherent tension between providing stable but appropriate placements requires further examination. It seems clear that young people need a stable base to develop their life skills. This implies a need for transitional accommodation to deliver more flexible support packages that can be tailored to meet the needs of individual young people in situ.

### **Resettlement and tenancy sustainment services**

This section examines service interventions in two key areas: assisting young people to access independent and/or settled housing; and tenancy sustainment services.

#### **Accessing settled housing**

Young people's difficulties in accessing appropriate social housing have been widely documented over the last decade (Anderson and Morgan, 1997; Anderson, 1999; Anderson and Thomson, 2005). The case studies confirmed that shortages of social housing remain acute in many areas and waiting times long. Moreover, evidence suggests that the quality of council and housing association properties is highly variable, and concerns about the placement of young people in 'rough' areas and/or far from support networks remain (Third *et al.*, 2001). Notably, the CLG survey demonstrated that feeling unsafe was consistently associated with poor quality of life outcomes, in that 16–17 year olds who reported feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood were likely to say that they were unhappy, that they worried about the future and/or that life was worse than when they had lived in their last settled accommodation (Pleace *et al.*, 2008). Young people in the focus groups highlighted the necessity of finding accommodation near to family and friends, and this was particularly true in the rural case study where transport links were limited – but more

difficult to achieve given the constrained availability of social housing in any one village or market town.

The case studies demonstrated that improvements in inter-agency working – including the creation of dedicated move-on forums for young people where packages of support could be arranged for young people being resettled – could be effective in reducing the amount of time that young people had to wait for social housing. In addition, the strengthening of the homelessness legislation had recently led to councils introducing new pathways into the social sector. For example, one local authority had altered the points system so that, if a young person completed a successful stay in temporary accommodation (acquiring necessary life skills) for a defined period, they would then be allocated a flat.

Shortages of social housing had led many case study local authorities and service providers to increasingly look to the private rented sector when seeking settled accommodation for young people. In some places, this was seen as really the only option available, especially to young people who fall outside priority need groups. The private rented sector was seen as having the potential to offer a number of advantages – most notably, greater choice of (often better quality) flats or houses in ‘nicer’ areas. However, four main barriers and concerns were identified, echoing many previous research reports (Kemp and Rugg, 1998, 2001; Rugg, 1999; SCSH, 2002; Harvey and Houston, 2005).

First, insecurity of tenure and the lack of protection from unscrupulous landlords was consistently raised as a problem. This was often cited by young people as a reason for preferring the social rented sector:

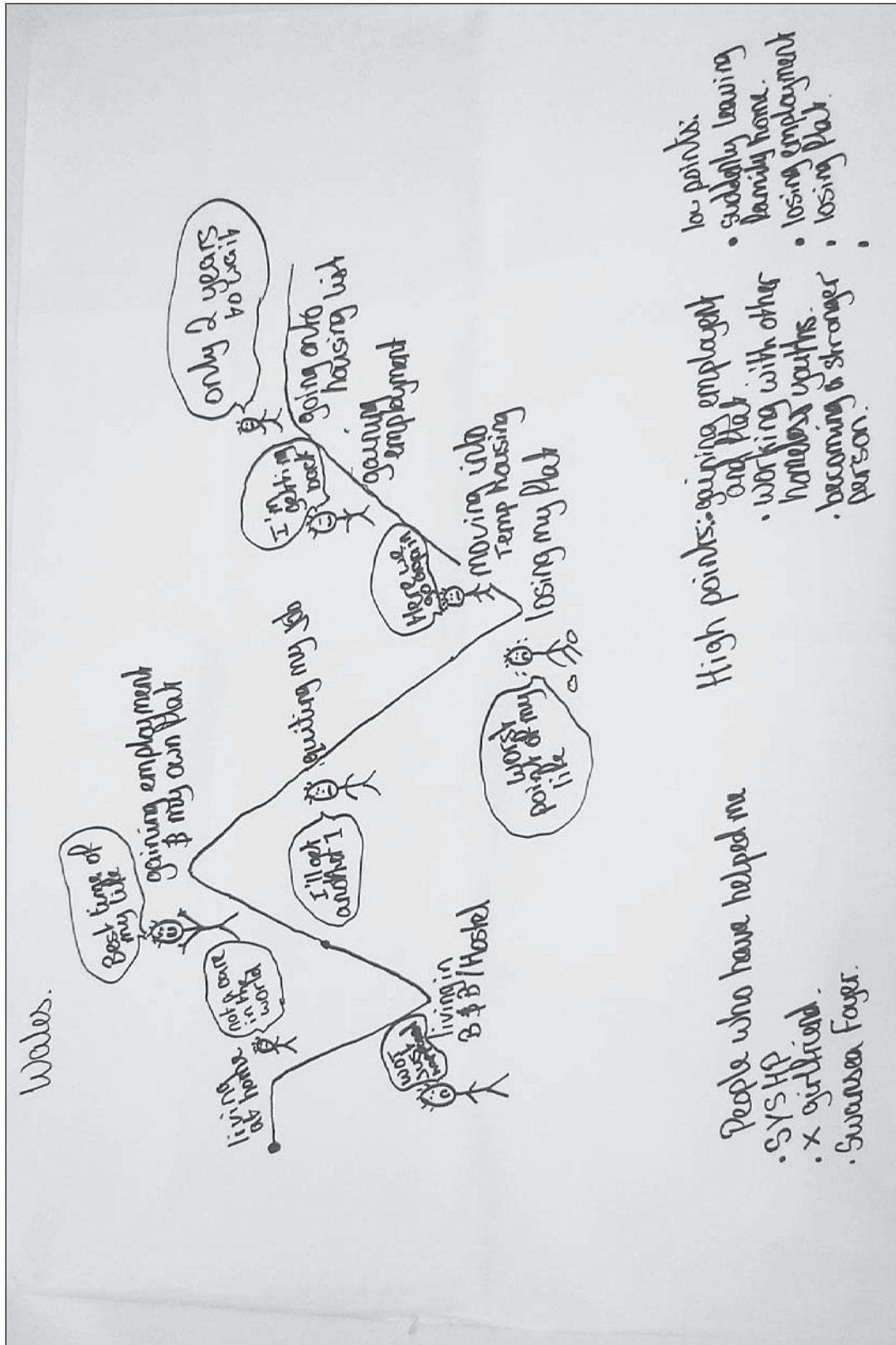
I would prefer the council than the private rented any day cos ... it's a secure home, it's more secure ... With private rented you have no long-term security. (Young person, Sedgefield)

Private landlords won't deal with you correctly if there's a problem. (Young person, Lambeth)

Second, there was a tendency for high rents in most areas, which was particularly problematic with the single room rent restrictions and/or could lead to long-term benefit dependency where rents were unaffordable for young people (re-)entering the workforce:

Private rented housing puts them in a trap because the rent is so high that they can't afford to go to work. (Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)

Journey 4 Young people's homelessness journeys: Example 4



Source: Young person's consultation event (see Appendix 1).

Third, the deposits and/or rent in advance required for most private sector lets were an insurmountable barrier for many young people. Finally, the reticence of many private sector landlords to consider young homeless people for tenancies – often borne out of problems experienced with Housing Benefit payments and/or assumptions about the ‘unreliability’ of young people – was an additional concern frequently raised:

Private landlords ... are not so willing to take a 17-, 18-year-old person.  
(Statutory sector representative, Leicester)

Case study housing agencies were, however, employing a number of strategies in an attempt to counteract some of these problems. First, rent deposit/guarantee schemes were in place in most areas. These were unanimously supported as a ‘good thing’ by agencies and young people, and have been shown to be effective when rental charges are not too high, they are well publicised and tenancy support is also provided (Rugg, 1996; ODPM, 2003; Rugg, 2003; Pawson, 2007). However, a series of problems had been encountered at a local level, with schemes tending to be small and targeted towards the older age groups given single room rent restrictions (see also Pawson *et al.*, 2006), as well as restrictive criteria such as no former rent arrears meaning that some young people did not easily qualify. In Belfast, one scheme was near collapse because of recent private sector rent increases fuelled by landlords’ ability to rent at higher prices to new migrants. Clearly, this form of provision requires further development if it is to make a greater contribution in the alleviation of youth homelessness.

More generally, housing agencies were working proactively to develop positive relationships with landlords, particularly by offering ongoing support to young people in private sector tenancies, which appeared successful in changing landlords’ preconceptions of the client group and also gave young people confidence in the sector. The utilisation of pre-tenancy benefit determinations was also proving useful in at least one area, with landlords sometimes willing to negotiate a little on rents where a housing agency was involved.

Finally, some housing agencies had begun to look at schemes to support young people with sharing in the private sector. This had largely been prompted by the specific problems of the single room rent restrictions but also, increasingly, by a questioning of the principles and practices underpinning the present resettlement trajectory of young people in housing need. In particular, providers were questioning whether the homeless ‘route’ – the end point of which was usually an independent tenancy (most commonly in the social rented sector) – was always best suited to young single people (and some couples without children) given its emphasis on living alone and settling long term in one tenancy (thus possibly constraining socio-economic and geographic mobility):

Why is it that the only option for young homeless people is to live on their own? I would like to see that changed. (Statutory sector representative, Swansea)

We set up young people with *an* opportunity to move. But that's not normal for young people! You don't just move once and stay there as a young person. (Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)

In one case study area, a scheme supporting small groups of young people with low support needs to access shared private rented sector accommodation was being piloted (see Box 8). Interim evaluations indicate that such schemes may be successful (as measured by tenancy sustainment rates) when care is taken in the matching of, and support provided to, young people.

### **Box 8 Increasing options within the PRS: Edinburgh Cyrenians' 'Flatmates' project**

Following a short-term pilot in Edinburgh in 2001, the Cyrenians relaunched a Big Lottery funded 'Flatmates' initiative in West Lothian in 2006. This aims to increase the affordability of private rented sector (PRS) accommodation for young people (with low or no support needs) who are subject to single room rent restrictions by creating and supporting sustainable flat shares.

When choosing PRS properties, staff ensure that tenancies will remain affordable should a Housing Benefit recipient enter paid employment. The scheme offers a rent deposit guarantee and involves an intensive flatmate 'matching' process, which takes into account where young people want to live, proximity to work/college and support networks, and any common interests.

Once matched, tenants participate in 'prepare to share' sessions to discuss potential problems and come to agreed solutions before the tenancy begins. They are given separate short assured tenancy agreements so that, if one tenant moves on, the security of other tenancies is not jeopardised. Cyrenians staff provide support (e.g. budgeting advice, help with benefits and mediation if necessary) for one year.

The pilot project has the capacity to house 40 individuals over its three-year duration. It is hoped that, if the initiative proves to be successful, it will inform the development of a similar scheme in Edinburgh and elsewhere.

It is clear that the promotion of shared accommodation would not be universally popular, however. For, when asked their opinions of such an option, the majority of young people's focus group participants were resistant to the idea, on the grounds of culturally ingrained expectations regarding their 'rights' to housing, and pervasive concerns about the financial and social 'risks' of sharing:

I cannae do shared housing because ... if somebody loses a job I'm fucked, eh? Because I cannae cover the whole rent cost. That'd be me back to square one. (Young person, Edinburgh)

You might end up with someone you don't like. What are you going to do then? You can't go and see your key worker then. (Young person, Lambeth)

### **Tenancy sustainment: practical and social support**

It is widely accepted that the provision of practical support during and after a young person's move into settled accommodation is key to helping them sustain a tenancy (Harding, 2001; Third *et al.*, 2001; Housing Corporation, 2002; ODPM, 2003), and provision in this area has improved significantly in recent years (ODPM, 2005). A fifth of Supporting People service interventions for non-statutorily homeless people consisted of floating support services (and 13 per cent of statutorily homeless interventions) and 3 per cent were resettlement services (see Figure 3 earlier in this chapter).

Floating support services were in place in all case study areas. Some were specialist young people's schemes, others were part of a generic support service; some were provided in house by the council, others by independent agencies (see Box 9 for illustrative examples). Many agencies that provided temporary accommodation also provided (short-term) resettlement support when the young person moved on.



### **Box 9 Variants of floating support: Belfast's MACS project and Leicester's STAR project**

Originally set up as a service specifically for care leavers, the Mulholland After Care Service (MACS) is a voluntary organisation now offering floating support for a wide range of vulnerable young people aged 16–25 (including young parents) with accommodation problems in Greater Belfast. The MACS floating support service offers advice and practical support in setting up a home, help with living skills and assistance in making links within the local community, as well as general emotional support for up to two years.

In Leicester, floating support services are provided city-wide by STAR (Supporting Tenants and Residents). STAR offers similar types of support to MACS, but is a generic service catering not just for young people aged 16+, but also older people, families, and Gypsies/Travellers. Over 60 staff operate from six local offices across the city. The scheme also does preventative work – supporting private rented sector tenants who have been identified by Housing Options as at risk of homelessness, for example. Like the MACS project, STAR supports clients for up to two years.

Research has found that floating support services are effective in assisting tenancy sustainment when appropriate accommodation is provided, there is good inter-agency working, and services are flexible and not withdrawn too quickly (Quilgars, 2000; Jones *et al.*, 2002; Randall and Brown, 2002; Pleace and Quilgars, 2003; Pawson *et al.*, 2006, 2007). The focus groups and consultation exercises confirmed that young people particularly valued help with budgeting and dealing with welfare benefit problems. Importantly, there were no reported shortages in the availability of floating support for young people. Overall, this was an area of provision that appeared to be functioning very well.

Many case study respondents were, however, concerned as to whether young people's wider social needs were being met adequately. Research has previously highlighted the loneliness experienced by many young people after being rehoused and its role in contributing to tenancy failure (Lemos, 2001; Third *et al.*, 2001; Scottish Youth Health Network and SCSH, 2004). Although still in its relative infancy, a renewed focus was being given to strengthening young people's social and emotional support networks via initiatives such as mentoring and befriending schemes (Scottish Social Networks, 2007; Shiner *et al.*, 2004). The important role of positive activities in young people's lives has also recently been highlighted in policy (HM Treasury, 2007a) and young people in the focus groups commonly highlighted the boredom associated with homelessness.



Very few young people involved in the focus groups or consultation had personal experience of specific mentoring or befriending schemes and the evidence base regarding their effectiveness has been described as inconclusive and 'patchy' (Quilgars, 2000; Social Exclusion Unit, 2005). Nevertheless, several case study practitioners noted that, while outcomes are difficult to measure, mentoring and befriending schemes can mitigate against social isolation, foster self-worth and raise young people's aspirations. Such schemes, they argued, are particularly valuable for young people with backgrounds characterised by fractured relationships and/or distrust:

Mentoring and befriending offers ... new situations where they can build new friendships and relationships ... It helps the client project the correct image across to people they're meeting, and not be too open or too closed, or too aggressive or too passive. That's really important for young people who've had disrupted childhoods and haven't had the chance to build what you'd call 'normal' friendships and relationships. (Voluntary sector representative, Edinburgh)

Clearly, further research regarding the effectiveness of such schemes is needed, particularly given the widely articulated assertions that sustainable solutions to youth homelessness will never be possible without increased investment in this area:

The difficulty is that, without creating those relationships ... no matter what we do for those people, they are going to struggle to sustain a lifestyle that is anything like easy. You know, they don't have the bits that everybody else has ... Unless we do something about social networks we are never going to get sustainable solutions. (Statutory sector representative, Edinburgh)

## Health services

### Primary care services

Confirming what is now generally assumed, the CLG study indicated that the vast majority of young homeless people (aged 16–17 and 16–24-year-old heads of homeless families) were registered with a GP. However, research has shown a worrying tendency for young homeless people not to prioritise their health and to avoid seeking medical assistance except in emergencies, and that their engagement with the NHS is often hampered by poor communication skills and low self-esteem (Reid and Klee, 1999; Thomson, 2003).

Case studies provided a number of examples of specialist health services being delivered for homeless young people, as well as specific groups such as care leavers and young offenders. Previous research has shown these to be welcomed by young people (Thomson, 2003), but that it is important that links to mainstream services are also prioritised in the long term (Quilgars and Pleave, 2003).

### **Mental health services**

Research has consistently identified mental health provision as an area of unmet need for young homeless people. The tendency for young people to fall between the legislative responsibilities of different agencies, young people's reluctance to access services for fear of what treatment may involve and a lack of skills in recognising and dealing with mental health problems among mainstream support providers have all been documented (Commander *et al.*, 1998; Reid and Klee, 1999; Watson, 1999; Taylor *et al.*, 2006; Vasiliou, 2006).

Case study support agencies reported that provision has improved significantly in recent years, at least in their areas, such that it was generally not difficult to access appropriate services for young people with severe diagnosable mental health problems. Many providers had strong links with community mental health teams, for example, and young people accessing such services usually reported very positive experiences:

I meet with the CPN every two weeks, and talk about anything really.  
(Young person, Edinburgh)

Some service providers did, however, identify a serious gap in provision for young people with 'low-level' mental health problems such as depression and anxiety:

Adult mental health services won't touch anybody until they are sectionable, essentially. Most of our young people are far from sectionable, or having a psychosis, but they have ongoing low-level mental health needs. (Statutory sector representative, Leicester)

In particular, they highlighted an urgent need for more accessible counselling services, given many young people's traumatic backgrounds, and for more anger management provision. In one area, it was clear that some provision was already in place but that not all providers were aware of its existence – pointing to the need for better information on service developments.

As noted elsewhere (e.g. Commander *et al.*, 1998; Vasiliou, 2006), case study young people reported that they were, on the whole, reluctant to seek help for mental health problems – usually because of stigma or fear that they would be put on medication. This being so, the frequent tendency for front-line staff in mainstream services to mistake the symptoms of mental health problems for young people ‘just being difficult’, or to ‘miss’ those masked by substance misuse problems (Vasiliou, 2006), represents a missed opportunity for referral to appropriate services.

### **Substance misuse services**

Research suggests that service uptake by young homeless people with substance misuse problems is low (Reid and Klee, 1999; Wincup *et al.*, 2003). This is normally attributed to service shortages, delays in accessing provision, a perception that existing services were intended for and only used by older people (particularly alcoholics) and/or the tendency for young people to see their drug use as recreational rather than problematic (Reed, 2002; Wincup *et al.*, 2003).

Case study providers reported that the availability of treatment for substance misuse problems (particularly heroin addiction) has improved significantly in recent years, but programmes have not evolved in accordance with young people’s changing patterns of substance misuse (see Chapter 3). There is therefore little available in the way of treatment for cannabis (especially skunk) dependence, crack cocaine addiction, or general polysubstance misuse:

The frequency with which people are using all sorts of different things ... doesn’t fit well with treatment services ... because there isn’t a traditional pattern of drug use there. It’s just as damaging, but you can’t offer somebody a treatment programme for that ... And, if they’re being helped with their drugs problem but not with their drink problem, then their drink problem becomes a much bigger issue ... You can’t deal with one without the other. (Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)

Young people’s failure to regard their substance misuse (binge drinking and cannabis use in particular) as problematic was highlighted as an ongoing, and serious, barrier to their engagement with treatment programmes.

Case study providers also highlighted the complex needs of some young people, and the need for mental health and substance misuse services to be integrated effectively (Vasiliou, 2006).

## Education, employment and training services

Numerous reports have highlighted the need for co-ordinated and specialist education, training and employment support for young people (Maxted, 1999; Randall and Brown, 1999; York Consulting Group, 2005), including via the foyer system (see above). There was a general consensus that the availability of specialist education and employment services had improved over the last ten years. Connexions services, and personal advisers in particular, played a key role at the local level, usually being seen as flexible and supportive by other agencies and young people alike (see also Coles *et al.*, 2004). The following comment typified the views of the majority of young people's focus group participants:

There are lots of things out there, it's just getting your arse off your seat.  
(Young person, Edinburgh)

While signposting services were commended as effective, young people's experiences of available education and training courses were mixed. Some were enjoying accredited courses with an identifiable long-term goal. Many, however, felt that they were drifting from one short course to another, with little direction. Young people reported that employment opportunities were limited and poorly paid.

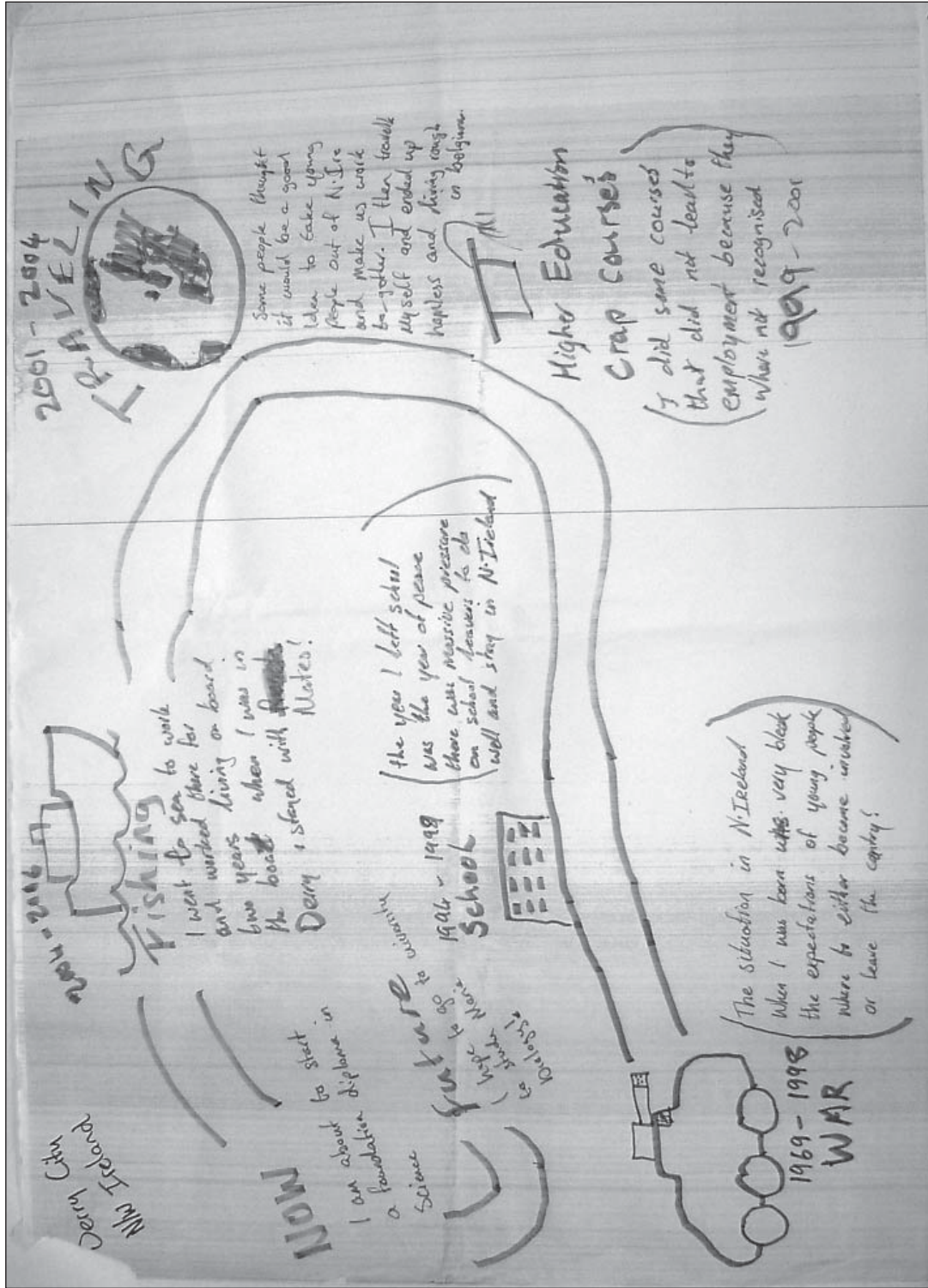
Front-line support workers frequently voiced concerns that recent legislative change failed to recognise adequately the vulnerabilities of young homeless people, and that individuals with particularly traumatic histories were at risk of being pushed into mainstream programmes before they were 'ready':

I understand why they want young people to engage. I would just say that some of our young people are not at a point where they can engage.  
(Voluntary sector representative, Swansea)

The case studies drew attention to three main barriers that seriously impeded young people's economic participation. First, the interruption of individual pathways to complete compulsory New Deal courses for Job Seeker's Allowance claimants was highlighted as problematic:

There's all these brilliant courses going on but some of our young people have to come off to do a mandatory [New Deal] course when we've spent a long time motivating them. It's not helpful, it's like taking two steps backwards. (Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)

Journey 5 Young people's homelessness journeys: Example 5



Source: Young person's consultation event (see Appendix 1).



Second, while the Educational Maintenance Allowance was seen as a positive move forward, the 16-hour rule for Housing Benefit recipients (although now to be reviewed) created difficulties for young people who wanted to study full-time.

Some courses you cannot do full-time because the Housing Benefit will close your claim. That's shit. Then you're like 'what shall I do?' (Young person, Lambeth)

Third, and most extensively reported, was the work disincentive created by high rent levels in temporary accommodation (and sometimes also private rented sector accommodation – see above). Young people were acutely aware that such accommodation would become unaffordable should they (re-)enter paid employment. There was evidence that, despite official local authority policy to the contrary, some support staff discouraged young people from taking up work while in temporary accommodation:

I've had staff say to me here, 'You're better not working while you stay here. You're better just signing on the dole.' (Young person, Edinburgh)

Case study service providers reported that employability was increasingly being given prominence in move-on strategies. However, there was still room for further development:

... it's part of the move on, rather than young people stagnating until they get a house. It's a big change, a big improvement in services, with people starting to think about it much earlier. (Voluntary sector representative, Edinburgh)

## 5 Strategic action on youth homelessness

### Key points

- The role of homelessness strategies had been a crucial part of the success in addressing youth homelessness at a local level. Links between the homelessness strategy and both Supporting People Plans and Children's and Young People Plans were highlighted in most case studies, although these had been achieved to differing extents.
- Operational joint working between statutory service providers was seen to have made some significant steps forward in the last five years. Factors contributing to this included policy and legislative change; specific dedicated and/or seconded posts; youth homelessness forums; and joint protocols. However, challenges still existed in inter-agency working, often arising from resource constraints and a lack of understanding of different organisations' roles.
- All case studies had developed, or were developing, joint protocols to ensure that agencies worked together more effectively to deliver housing and other support services to young homeless people. These appeared to be working well, although they had limited applicability to non-priority need groups of young people.
- Case study respondents differed in their views regarding the adequacy of central funding. Respondents made a plea for longer-term funding of initiatives. There is a question as to whether competitive funding will lead to poor performing authorities falling further behind in addressing homelessness in the future.
- The monitoring of initiatives was improving at both the national and local level, though the development of more appropriate measures for preventative work, and the incorporation of both soft and hard outcomes into measures, were seen as future priorities.



## **Introduction**

This chapter examines the development of strategic approaches to addressing youth homelessness. There is limited national-level evidence on joint working. Therefore this chapter draws almost exclusively on the case study experience. It should be noted that one of the criteria for selecting the case studies was evidence of good practice. Therefore it is possible that these are better performing authorities and that joint working may be less well advanced nationally.

First, local strategic approaches to youth homelessness are examined. Second, the details of operational inter-agency working, including the role of joint protocols, are reviewed. Third, funding sources in place to address youth homelessness are explored. Lastly, the chapter considers the measurement and monitoring of youth homelessness outcomes.

## **Local strategic planning**

### **Homeless strategies and inter-agency forums**

Homelessness strategies have now been in place for approximately five years, with most authorities in the process of producing their second strategy. Central government guidance in England (DTLR, 2002) highlighted the need for a specific youth homelessness strategy. Research in Scotland has suggested that the particular needs of young people had not been well recognised in homelessness strategies (SCSH, 2004). In England, currently 12 per cent of English local authorities have a specific youth homelessness strategy, 76 per cent have a section in their main strategy and 12 per cent do not give specific attention to youth homelessness (Pleace *et al.*, 2007a).<sup>1</sup> One of the six case studies currently had a separate (draft) youth homelessness strategy, with a second having previously had a separate strategy in the early 2000s.

Research has shown that the development of homelessness strategies has resulted in improved joint working and fresh thinking on tackling homelessness, including youth homelessness (LGA, 2004; Anderson and Thomson, 2005). Agencies in all six case studies echoed these earlier findings, stating that the development of homelessness strategies has been a crucial part of addressing youth homelessness. While some local authorities were proactive in this area before 2002, it provided an additional spur and (along with Supporting People, see below) is likely to have led

to a more consistent approach to youth homelessness across the UK. Additional national-level guidance in this area was also felt to have had an impact:

Maybe the homelessness strategy, 2002, was the kick-start to this process, in many ways, because we couldn't do it in isolation. There was a lot of work going on before 2002 but I think post-2002 there has been a big push. (Statutory sector representative, Belfast)

I think it has made each local authority housing department look at their prevention services, look in a more structured way at the whole issue of homelessness, look at their responses ... and that is as a direct result of the strategies and the joint work of the homeless action partnership. The number of homeless people in County Durham has gone down significantly ... The mediation service, the joint protocol, they all came out of the identified needs in the housing strategies. (Statutory sector representative, Sedgefield)

I do think Edinburgh's approach to homelessness is fantastic, I really do. The homelessness strategy, the prevention and crisis focus groups, it's a fact that it involves everybody, or is open to all the agencies. Everybody is having a say. It really is very good, within all the constraints that everybody is working under. (Statutory sector representative, Edinburgh)

Housing or homelessness action partnerships at a local authority or county level were usually in place to monitor the overall homelessness strategy. These groups were crucial in driving through change, linking to other strategies and negotiating extra resources. Although focused on homelessness more generally, youth homelessness appeared to have been accorded a high profile within these groups in the case studies.

### **Links to other local strategies**

The importance of effective links between the homelessness strategy and Children's and Young People Plans was highlighted in most case studies, although this had been achieved to differing extents. For example, in one local authority, it was felt that housing and homelessness issues had not been given adequate attention in the Children's and Young Person's Plan. In contrast, in the County Durham Plan 2006–09, homelessness was central to two of the key priorities, giving it a high strategic relevance, including:

We want children and young people to be protected from homelessness and eviction: we will make sure all agencies work together to tackle homelessness.

Supporting People strategies/plans and homelessness strategies were seen to work in tandem to address youth homelessness, although explicit recognition of youth issues was greater in some than others. For example, in one area, some youth homelessness provision had been categorised under the 'single homelessness' category. Nonetheless, recent plans tended to reflect young people in housing need as a future priority area (in one area, five of the eleven confirmed projects were for young people). Despite overall budget cuts in most case study areas, strategic working relationships between Supporting People and housing departments, as well as other providers, were seen as highly positive:

Before, when we had a strategic role with the voluntary sector, they would do their own thing! But now, all the funding comes through Supporting People, and it's a way of getting everybody to co-ordinate and work together ... it has made us think about what we have got and using it to best advantage. (Statutory sector representative, Leicester)

The need for improved links was signalled in some other areas – for example, with education and employment (particularly mentioned in Northern Ireland). Sometimes strategies appeared to chime together relatively well but they were not formally linked (e.g. homelessness strategy with drug and alcohol strategy, teenage parents' strategy and so on). Occasionally, it was thought that national-level policies could be better linked than they were currently and operational workers were also sometimes sceptical about the extent to which strategy was reflected in real changes in practice on the ground:

It's getting better locally, but nationally those different strategies ... don't join up. They're starting to, but they don't. In a sense there's no point having a homelessness strategy which says that young people plans have to conduct an audit of provision for homeless young people if, then, the guidance on young people plans doesn't say the same ... If things don't match up at central government, how on earth are you going to do it locally? (Voluntary sector representative, Swansea)

There is a lot but does it ever filter down to where it's actually supposed to be, everything is a strategy or a policy ... We had a young couple coming in today who thought they were going to get that house and they haven't ... I don't know, it just never seems to change. (Voluntary sector representative, Sedgefield)

## Joint working at an operational level

Operational joint working between statutory service providers was seen to have made some significant steps forward in the last five years in the case study areas. A number of key factors contributed to this.

Policy and legislative change had made a major impact. A survey found that 78 per cent of English local authorities believed that the homelessness strategy had enabled them to engage in effective joint working (LGA, 2004). This was also confirmed at the case study level. In addition, although working from a relatively low base (ODPM, 2004), relationships between housing and social services were reported to have improved since responsibilities for accommodating 16- and 17-year-old care leavers had transferred to social services. In Belfast, the new care leavers' legislation had been a key driver for improvements in both strategic and operational joint working:

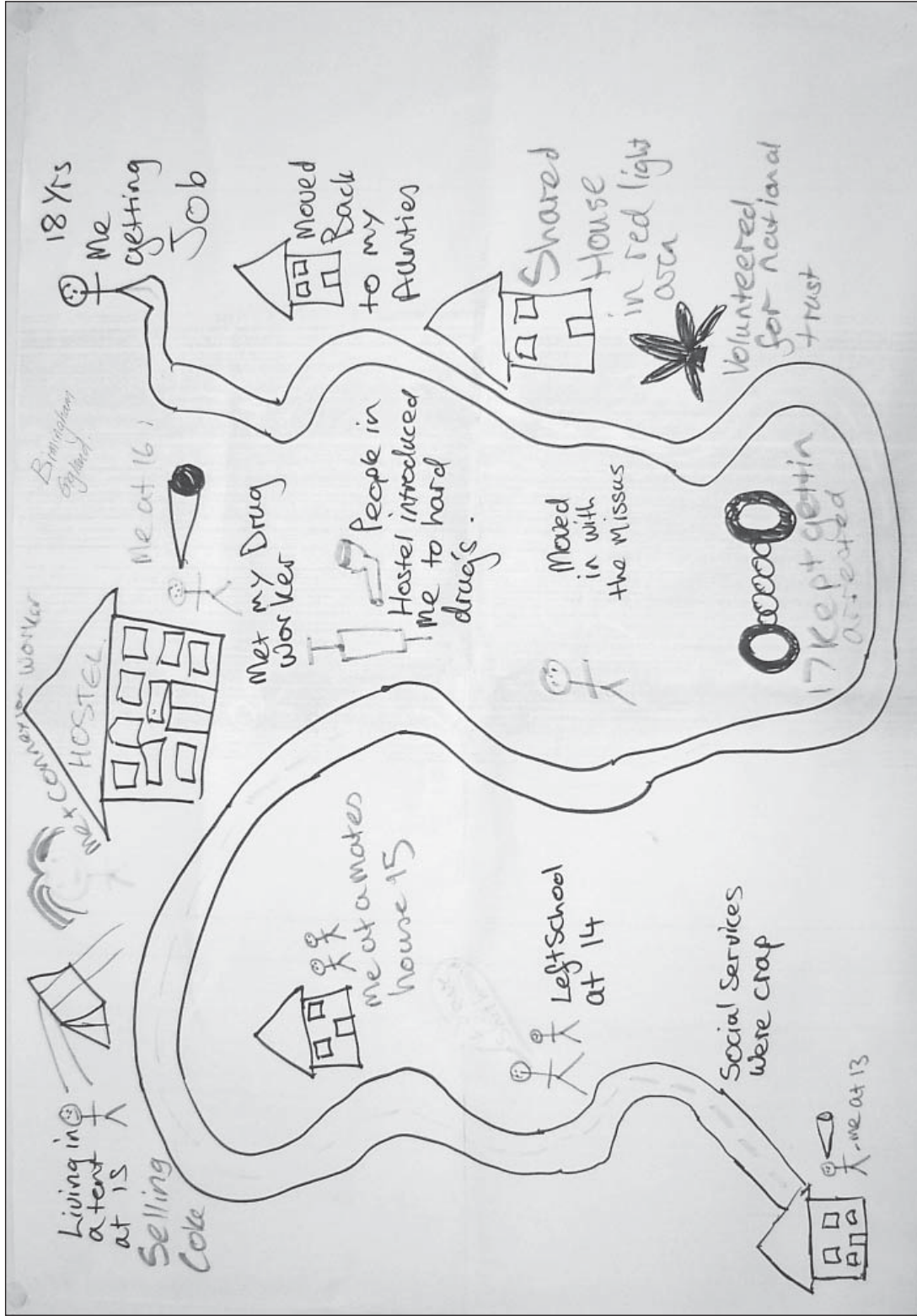
I think there has been a lot of momentum and excellent practice in terms of the needs of care leavers and particularly their supported accommodation needs ... And that undoubtedly is going to have an impact on our non care leaver youth population but I think there is a need for a replication of some of the work that is happening. (Voluntary sector representative, Belfast)

In Swansea, the assessment of homeless 16 and 17 year olds under the Children's Act (see Chapter 3) had also led to better joint working relationships: 'Where you don't have one side saying, "This is mine, this is yours"' (Statutory sector representative).

The secondment of workers, or specific posts, was seen as highly beneficial to joint working. For example, having a dedicated housing person in the Youth Offending Team in Lambeth was seen as a positive development, whereas a similar post in social services had been lost and joint working had suffered. The commitment of individual members of staff, as well as senior-level 'champions' of youth homelessness, was also pivotal in achieving good joint working.

Joint youth homelessness forums appeared to function effectively in a number of case study authorities. For example, in Leicester, the 'high-risk and move-on subgroup' was examining joint needs assessments, outcome measurement and longer-term housing options for young people. The development of joint protocols was also seen as key to improving joint working (see section below).

Journey 6 Young people's homelessness journeys: Example 6



Source: Young person's consultation event (see Appendix 1).



However, challenges still existed in inter-agency working, often arising from resource constraints and a lack of understanding of each other's roles. There were reports of some young people still falling between the responsibilities of social services and housing, particularly at key ages – with social services openly admitting they were reluctant to take on 15-and-a-half year olds because of the continuing responsibility:

They [Housing] were saying, 'If you don't have anywhere to live, your social worker should sort that out', and I was, 'Well I don't have a social worker any more', and they're saying, 'Well by law you have to have one' ... and saying, 'Come back tomorrow and we'll see what we can do'. So I was on the street for two weeks. (Young person, Belfast)

There was a clear need for more joint working in some areas, for example with Jobcentre Plus/Jobs and Benefits:

You kind of think you are on the same side, but you realise that you're not when you have conversations with people at the Jobcentre. Instead of collaborating it just feels sometimes that they are obstructing you or your young person from getting what they need. (Voluntary sector representative, Lambeth)

In addition, in at least two case studies, it was felt that links needed to be improved, not only with private landlords (see Chapter 4), but also with housing associations:<sup>2</sup>

And we have problems with RSLs [registered social landlords] in the area as well, because, although they now have more of a responsibility to help with prevention of homelessness, in reality they don't, and it's trying to get them on board and everything ... They exclude people, if you have a homeless applicant who gets through the criteria and are nominated to a housing association, they will do their own checks on that person and, if they are not an ideal tenant, it's tough, they don't get through. (Statutory sector representative, Sedgefield)

The involvement of young people in both service delivery design and strategic planning was seen to have improved over the five to ten years, with policy-makers and service providers recognising its importance (Cummings *et al.*, 2000; SCSH, 2006). Overall, there has been an emphasis on 'participation' rather than 'control' (Edwards and Percy-Smith, 2004). It has also been suggested that the first recommendation of the Scottish Homelessness Task Force, the empowerment of homeless people, remains the area with least progress (Anderson, 2008).

### **Joint assessment/joint protocols**

There were a number of good examples of integrated teams that undertook joint assessments of the housing and other support needs of homeless people. For example, in Belfast, there was a central multi-agency homelessness team (for all age groups). In Lambeth, a SNAP (Support Needs Assessment and Placement) team provided an assessment and referral gateway to all Supporting People services. There was a clear recognition by all providers and young people alike that a single, joint assessment was usually preferable to each provider undertaking a new assessment on referral:<sup>3</sup>

If you take a young person coming in for a homelessness assessment, they go through that assessment and then meet myself or a project worker for another assessment, meet another service provider and go through another assessment ... there's all these assessments and the young person is getting really tired and fed up with it. If we're able to tie these things up, and get over the hurdles and suspicions about shared information ... (Statutory sector representative, Edinburgh)

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is being introduced for all young people and children's services in England, and case studies were in the process of bringing their assessment arrangements into line with this. For example, Leicester had recently developed a joint assessment process for care leavers, where all key agencies worked to each young person's pathway plan. An outcomes framework had been created using the five Every Child Matters areas:

Before we were all doing our own assessments in our own little worlds and not working terribly well together ... [Now] we've all signed up to the same outcomes that we're trying to achieve, so everyone is working together toward those outcomes. That's worked very well ... The pathway plan meets everybody's legal requirements, duties, needs. We've structured it so that we can all work to that without having to do multiple assessments. (Statutory sector representative, Leicester)

Communities and Local Government recently reported that three-quarters of councils in England had implemented joint working arrangements between housing and children's services, setting out responsibilities for homeless 16–17 year olds.<sup>4</sup> All case studies in the review had developed, or were developing, joint protocols to ensure that agencies worked together more effectively to deliver housing and other support services to young homeless people. The extension of the priority need groups as well as new arrangements such as for Safeguarding Children arising from



various children's Acts appeared to have been a spur to improvement of these links at a local level.

Previous work has indicated that there can be problems in ensuring the effectiveness of joint protocols. For example, there is a need for adequate training of key agencies to ensure that the protocol is used, and used properly. Sometimes, the voluntary sector is not included in protocols because they do not have legislative responsibilities in the area. Monitoring is essential to review a protocol's effectiveness. Finally, agencies may have unrealistic expectations and/or inadequate resources to undertake the work (Centrepoin, 2004). While case study respondents acknowledged some of these problems had existed in the past, in the main the examples developed appeared to be very much working documents with sign-up by the relevant agencies (extending to the voluntary sector in some, but not all, instances).

The main types of protocols that had been developed in the case studies involved:

- local housing authority and Youth Offending Service/Teams (e.g. Sedgefield);
- housing and social services for care leavers (e.g. Leicester) or 16–21 year olds (e.g. Northern Ireland);
- a range of agencies for young people for 16 and 17 year olds (see County Durham example, Box 10).

### **Box 10 Operationalising joint assessments: County Durham's joint protocol for homeless 16 and 17 year olds**

The joint protocol, which became fully operational in 2006, is an agreement that establishes the roles and responsibilities of different agencies towards homeless 16 and 17 year olds, with the aim of promoting an effective assessment and meeting of the individual's needs.

Statutory agencies signed up to the joint protocol include: the seven housing departments in County Durham, Children and Young People's Services Children in Need Teams, Connexions and the Youth Engagement Service. Three voluntary sector providers (commissioned by the Children and Young People's Service and the housing departments) provide support to young people across the seven districts: SHAID (Single Homeless Action Initiative in Derwentside), DISC (Developing Initiatives Supporting Communities) and Moving On.

*(Continued)*

When a young person is identified as homeless or at risk of homelessness, the first contact agency undertakes a standard initial assessment. If this agency cannot meet the young person's needs, a panel meeting is called to discuss the different options available to the young person. An action plan is drawn up and, at this point, one of the voluntary agency providers usually takes lead responsibility for ensuring this is completed.

In 2006–07, 232 young people were supported through the process. In 106 cases, homelessness was recorded as being prevented.

Centrepoint supports the joint protocol and regular local feedback meetings are held to ensure any arising issues are addressed at the earliest opportunity.

Agencies explained that the protocols led to a more co-ordinated and planned response to young people's needs. It did not prevent disagreements entirely, but structured opportunities for discussing and agreeing ways forward were in place. The protocols usually supported prevention agendas by attempting to avoid the need for young people, particularly care leavers and 16 and 17 year olds, to have to present as homeless – if agencies could offer an appropriate housing and support package:

It has happened in the past where we've had a real, you know, 'You're not doing this' and 'you're not doing that' and it's worked, you know. People have aired their views honestly and openly, which I think is good for agencies to get around a table and thrash things out. (Statutory sector representative, Sedgefield)

If they present here at the beginning to the district council their immediate reaction might be, before the joint protocol ... just to put them down the homelessness route because they know they are in priority need and all the rest of it. However, now it's much more likely, or it should be, that they gather other people to talk about actually what is the best thing for this young person ... they don't have to go through the whole process unless it's going to be useful for them ... And, since this has been running, we have had incredible results in terms of young people who have been making statutory homelessness applications, it has gone down from about 330 in 2004–05 to about 120 last year. (Voluntary sector representative, Sedgefield)

The specific legislative requirements for particular groups underpinned the protocols. However, this did mean that the protocols had limited application to non-priority need groups.

## Funding youth homelessness initiatives

The development of a much more proactive government agenda on homelessness has meant that new monies have become available, in particular to develop the preventative agenda. The vast majority of local authorities (80 per cent) believed that homelessness strategies had led to the provision of additional resources to address homelessness locally (LGA, 2004).

Some monies are attached to 'stretch targets' where local authorities have agreed to aim towards key outcomes – for example, the County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership was using pump-priming grant from the local area agreement to aim for the following targets, which, if met, would generate about £1 million for the county:

- reduction in number of homeless presentations among 16–17 year olds;
- reduced number of repeat homelessness cases involving children and young people;
- reduction of 550 cases of homelessness achieved by housing advice case work by 2009.

There is, however, a question as to whether this sort of competitive funding will lead to poor performing authorities falling further behind in addressing homelessness in the future.

Case study respondents differed in their assessment as to whether central funding was adequate or not:

I've never had it better in terms of getting the resources in order to do what I need to do. (Statutory sector representative)

I agree with the prevention agenda ... you should look at the bigger picture ... but the resources are not there to carry that out properly. I think the prevention work that we are doing, I think, if we had more money, then you could continue that prevention work, visiting that person once a week, making sure what the outcome is, has continued, but that isn't happening ... the Government are unfair in providing funding to some local authorities who have got that money to do better prevention work. (Statutory sector representative)

While joint commissioning of services remained in its infancy overall, the extra funds from central government had appeared to spur some agencies to jointly commission some services:

[Seven to eight years ago] you might try talking to people and they might support what you were doing in principle but they would never fund it, they would say, 'Oh yes we agree with it, but it's your priority'. And that has changed completely now. (Statutory sector representative, Sedgefield)

However, case study respondents made a plea for longer-term funding for initiatives – in terms both of prevention monies and, more generally, for pilot initiatives (for example, a flat-sharing scheme in one authority had closed because of lack of funding).

Supporting People was the main funder of supported housing and floating support services, and, despite concerns over cuts, was seen as the most important source of ongoing funds. A few providers, however, identified that there remained a lack of funding for 'extras' that fell outside the housing-related support needs of Supporting People – for example, the funding of social activities or furniture for flats.

## **Measuring and monitoring outcomes**

At the time of the introduction of homelessness strategies, data collection was identified as in need of improvements, with problems including agencies using different methods of data collection, a lack of depth of information and problems with continuous monitoring (ODPM, 2004; see also Appendix 1).

The case studies revealed that local authorities were increasingly asking individual (youth) homelessness service providers (including their homelessness sections and in-house providers) to collect reliable data on both service use and outcomes. This was often influenced by national government directives and funding frameworks (see above). In particular, providers needed to supply monitoring information for Supporting People, with the framework currently being developed to focus on outcomes as well as process. In addition, local authorities were collecting data on Best Value measures (including BV 214 measuring the 'proportion of households accepted as statutorily homeless who were accepted as statutorily homeless by the same Authority within the last two years' and the BV 213 on housing advice casework intervention). Public sector agreements (PSAs) also fall within the scope

of local area agreements – for example, the recently outlined PSA to ‘increase the number of children and young people on the path to success’ (HM Treasury, 2007b). Finally, there were particular targets in place in some countries and not others, such as the recent target to end use of B&Bs for 16 and 17 year olds for more than two to six weeks in Wales (see Chapter 1).

There were two examples of wider monitoring initiatives in place in the case study areas (Edinburgh and County Durham, Box 11). Both of these initiatives had required substantial up-front and continuing resources to run smoothly, in particular to train providers, provide regular monitoring feedback to individual providers and also to keep a high profile at a strategic level. One respondent pointed out that the systems sounded relatively simple but they required a ‘big cultural and psychological shift from outputs to outcomes, it took a couple of years to get that message really sunk in’. Both systems were collecting data on all homeless service users irrespective of age, but the flexibility of the systems meant reports on particular age groups (as well as many other variables) could be produced easily.

### **Box 11 Two examples of specific local authority/county-wide monitoring initiatives**

#### *Edinburgh’s Common Homelessness Outcomes (ECHO) system*

The local authority designed and run ECHO system monitors strategic and service performance in homelessness against a range of shared customer-focused outcomes. Nearly 80 mainly third-party service providers complete the monitoring information, including outreach, accommodation and support services. All variables can be analysed by age, providing detailed information on homelessness outcomes on young people.

The system is in the process of being updated to a web-based outcomes system – the Edinburgh Common Client Outcomes (ECCO). This new system, which will be fully operational in 2008, will involve about 200 providers of housing and support services in both the voluntary and statutory sector. The system will allow providers to share information on service users.

#### *County Durham initiative to monitor homelessness and supported accommodation needs*

This monitoring initiative, established in 2003, is a multi-agency initiative that collects information to identify unmet housing and support need in County

*(Continued)*

Durham. The scheme is funded by a range of agencies, including Supporting People, Children and Young People's Services, the local authority districts and the Drug and Alcohol Action Team.

About 30 agencies provide information on their service users' characteristics and support needs, and some basic information on outcomes. An officer is employed in Centrepont to maintain and analyse the database. Aggregated reports are provided on a county-wide and district basis, as well as thematic reports on a range of subjects, including domestic violence, 16 and 17 year olds and learning disabilities. In 2006–07, 1,987 returns were made. All information can be analysed and cross-referenced by a variety of factors including age, gender, specific support needs, current housing situation and accommodation type needed.

Voluntary sector providers (and some statutory sector representatives) were concerned that the data requested by central and local government was too restrictive in its scope, with too great an emphasis on hard outcomes at the expense of softer ones. Some representatives thought this emphasis was growing, though others felt national government was getting better at recognising softer outcomes. Voluntary sector providers also felt it was important to collect data on 'distance travelled' wherever possible – for example, debt reduction:

[Soft indicators are really important] because hard indicators might show that a young person has sustained a tenancy but that young person might be isolated, staying in, not have any social network, not eating well, perhaps even becoming mentally ill. (Voluntary sector representatives, Edinburgh)

Respondents stressed that more work was required in identifying and agreeing outcomes measures. This was particularly the case for preventative work. There was a particular plea for realistic outcome measures from mediation service providers. Some local authorities were being very careful to apply equal weight to the aims of keeping young people in the family home and assisting planned moves where the former was not possible (see Chapter 4). In addition, the importance of maintaining contact with the family after moving out of the parental home was emphasised. However, other authorities appeared more concerned with 'quick wins':

Local authorities just want to be able to tick their boxes for each case after a fortnight or after a month, 'case closed'. But then, if you get the same young people back a month later, then it's, 'Oh mediation doesn't work'. (Voluntary sector representative)

What we probably haven't got to grips with yet is proper ways of measuring the success of prevention and how to measure that success. It's a big ask, I mean we don't know how many young people are preventing from becoming homeless due to education schemes in schools. We measure input, we know the number of young people we have spoken to, we know the number of programmes we have run, and we have feedback from the young people as to how valuable they thought it was. But how do you go on and measure how many are prevented from homelessness? (Statutory sector representative, Belfast)



## 6 Progress and priorities in tackling youth homelessness

This final chapter considers the progress that has been made over the last decade in addressing youth homelessness in the UK. It also looks to the future, outlining issues that still need to be tackled and considering the policy opportunities available to make this happen.

The overall policy context of youth homelessness has changed significantly over the last decade. A much more proactive and strategic approach to tackling youth homelessness has been pursued, with the homelessness legislation strengthened and a key shift from crisis response towards prevention.

Within this, the evolution and articulation of policy has taken different emphases in each of the four countries. Scotland has extended the rights to assistance for homeless people to the greatest extent, while England has pursued the prevention agenda most proactively. Wales has pursued both fairly equally and Northern Ireland is currently extending both agendas. These distinctions may widen as Scotland moves towards its target of abolishing priority need for homeless people, though the prevention agenda is also likely to be strengthened to support this (Anderson, 2008).

The chapter returns to the four central questions of the review.

- What patterns can be discerned in the scale of youth homelessness over the past ten years?
- What do we know of the profile and nature of youth homelessness? Has this changed over time?
- What impact have policy and practice developments had on outcomes for homeless young people and those at risk of homelessness?
- What are the implications for future policy and practice priorities in addressing youth homelessness?

## A reduction in youth homelessness?

The review estimates that at least 75,000 young people experienced homelessness in 2006–07 and approximately 50,000 young people were homeless at any one time. These figures draw on reasonably robust data sources on service use, though they do not include ‘hidden’ homelessness (young people temporarily staying with friends/families and in other informal situations). Nonetheless, the figures suggest that a significant problem of youth homelessness still exists in the UK – that possibly one in every 100 young people may have contact with a homelessness service annually.

It is very difficult to assess change in youth homelessness levels over time. Legislative change across the UK, and developments in monitoring, mean that different aspects of youth homelessness are now being measured than was the case a decade ago. The last inquiry into youth homelessness (Evans, 1996) estimated a much higher number of young people experiencing homelessness than this review. However, data was more limited, definitions were different and the assumptions made possibly led to an overestimate at the time.

Across the UK overall, annual figures on the number of young people experiencing homelessness have reduced in the last few years. However, most of this reduction is accounted for by changes in statutory homelessness in England. Trends therefore are best explored by considering the different elements of youth homelessness and examining countries separately.

Recent statistics show a reduction in statutory youth homelessness in England and to some extent in Wales. This has not been the case in Scotland or Northern Ireland. The review strongly suggests that the fall in official youth homelessness statistics in England and Wales is in large part a result of the preventative agenda, with young people being diverted away from homeless assessments and towards other initiatives. In contrast, in Scotland, it is acknowledged that the extension of rights has provided ‘more incentive to apply to their local authority as homeless’ (Scottish Executive, 2005, p. 19). Future changes in youth homelessness figures are likely to continue to reflect changing statutory responsibilities and allied policies – as prevention is extended further and more consistently across England and Wales, and as Scotland moves towards the 2012 abolition of priority need. Northern Ireland may see a rise in figures with the likely introduction of a 16–17-year-old priority need category, although this may be offset by a preventative agenda.

Despite problems with data measurement, ‘rough sleeping’ – traditionally understood as sleeping on the streets in cities for extended periods of time – has fallen over the last decade. It is certain that the numbers of young people experiencing this

form of rough sleeping have reduced over this time. However, other information (from services, studies and this review) indicates that a significant minority of young people may experience short periods of sleeping rough particularly before receiving assistance from agencies.

There is no indication that non-statutory homelessness has reduced significantly over time. Again, data sources are poor, but provision for young people in housing need in the form of hostels and supported accommodation does not appear to have contracted over the last decade. In many areas, there is excess demand for the accommodation available, and problems of 'silting up' of provision due to lack of move-on accommodation. It is, however, important to recognise that some of this provision offers longer-term, supportive settings and it can be debated as to whether young people using this provision are homeless.

The prevention agenda represents a significant opportunity to reduce the scale of homelessness in the future. A stronger statutory safety net is, however, likely to lead to greater numbers of young people accepted as homeless – at least in the short term. Ultimately, the scale of future homelessness will be dependent on the effectiveness of both these systems in producing sustainable outcomes for young people, as well as changes in the underlying social conditions that contribute to homelessness. Non-statutory homelessness requires more sustained attention if overall homelessness is to be effectively tackled in the future.

## The changing nature of youth homelessness?

### Who is homeless?

The demographic profile of youth homelessness has not changed greatly in the last decade. Young women continue to outnumber young men within statutory homelessness acceptances, while young men (over the age of 18) are more likely to be non-statutory homeless. Significant numbers of young families and single people (and couples) continue to be affected by homelessness. There is an inadequate understanding of household formation among young people in housing need and how services assist or undermine this key area of young people's lives and transition to adulthood. The gender dynamics of youth homelessness are also poorly understood.

The majority of young homeless people in the UK are white, although young people with an ethnic minority background (particularly black British) are over-represented

in England. There appears to be a particularly serious issue of young people from a minority ethnic background being over-represented in London. This requires further investigation.

Young people with origins outside the UK have always been a small proportion of the homeless population. There are some concerns that more people from new migrant groups may become homeless in the future. This needs to be monitored, although it is likely that the vast majority of young homeless people will continue to be British citizens.

Research has consistently demonstrated that young people who experience homelessness are a highly disadvantaged group who are likely to be from poor backgrounds and who have experienced difficult or disrupted childhoods. It is unclear whether a higher proportion of young people have multiple health and support needs compared to a decade ago and/or whether agencies are now better at recognising these needs.

### **Why are young people homeless?**

The review confirmed that, while the main 'trigger' for homelessness among young people is relationship breakdown, many young people have experienced long-term problems at home, often involving violence.

There was a call from policy and practice experts to place a greater emphasis on understanding and supporting family relationships, and the wider social networks of (potentially) homeless young people. Within this, there is a need for more robust assessments of the risks that young people may face at home and recognition that some young people will need to be supported in an early move out of the family home (while maintaining significant family relationships, wherever possible).

Young people at risk of homelessness commonly have few resources and/or supports to assist them to access the limited, affordable housing opportunities in most local housing markets. The particularly vulnerable position of young people who have been looked after has been recognised in the last decade (as well as to some extent other key groups like young offenders).

### **What is the impact of homelessness?**

Young people's experience of homelessness continues to be a cause for concern, particularly high levels of depression/anxiety and substance misuse problems (some of which originate before homelessness).

A clear picture of young people's lives being 'on hold' emerges from the review. Former instability at home is too frequently replaced by continuing instability as young people attempt to access limited services. Services are often unable to provide the stable base that every young person requires to achieve a successful transition to adulthood.

A particularly worrying finding is that homelessness can lead to increased levels of non-participation in formal education, training or employment. Arising from the youth consultation, young people's 'journeys' through homelessness demonstrate a faltering progression through service interventions towards stable employment and housing. Nonetheless, there is some evidence that interventions can lead to positive improvements in young people's lives.

No studies are available to compare the impact of youth homelessness on young people now compared to a decade ago. While some aspects of homelessness, like high mobility, health and economic impacts, are unlikely to have changed significantly, there is evidence that young people now receive greater professional support and help with transitions.

### **Impact of policy and practice developments on outcomes**

The review considered a range of policy and practice developments to prevent and address youth homelessness. The following key areas were considered:

- preventative initiatives;
- temporary/transitional accommodation;
- resettlement and tenancy sustainment;
- addressing the non-housing needs of homeless young people;
- strategic/joint working.

### Preventative initiatives

Prevention of homelessness has been one of the most significant policy developments in the last decade. Despite some initial fears and limited evidence of 'gatekeeping' in some local authorities, the vast majority of providers and young people that took part in the review were very supportive of the principles underpinning the prevention agenda. Services such as family mediation and school interventions were becoming a key feature of homelessness service responses.

There was a strong call to take this prevention agenda further, particularly by focusing on earlier interventions and on parents as well as young people. The need to focus on breaking a 'cycle of disadvantage' within families and communities at the local level was also emphasised in the policy consultation process. Present policy direction appears to offer opportunities to extend services in this direction, including the recent call for services to 'think family' (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2008). The development of early intervention initiatives on homelessness should also be effectively linked into new targeted youth support initiatives (DfES, 2007b) or similar initiatives in other countries. Such an initiative provides an opportunity for key relevant agencies to identify the full range of risks to young people's well-being – including issues such as offending, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol misuse, and poor mental health, alongside homelessness. The role of housing providers within these early intervention initiatives needs further consideration.

Despite widespread support for prevention, there have been few robust evaluations of preventative initiatives to date. As local authorities and providers embrace the agenda, there is an urgent need for better information on 'what works' in this area. Early indications suggest that interventions such as mediation will be effective for some young people, but not all. It seems likely that preventative initiatives will be most effective in the first instance for those young people where family conflict is not too severe. Preventative provisions may therefore be a welcome addition to existing services, but the findings of this review indicate that they will not be suitable for all young people and should not be regarded as a panacea solution.

Further, some providers identified the need for a clearer definition of what constitutes 'prevention'. Prevention of homelessness for older people already encompasses assistance with retaining people's present accommodation (for example, at the end of a short-term tenancy in the private rented sector). Conceptually, prevention of homelessness for young people needs to encompass both helping people avoid the need to leave home prematurely and with a lack of support and preventing homelessness at the point of leaving home (and later) by providing adequate housing options and support for young people.

### Temporary/transitional accommodation

Preventative initiatives will never take away completely the need for the provision of crisis interventions for some young people. Agencies and young people reported a shortage of emergency accommodation, including a lack of provision for young people with complex needs. Developments in this area are still required to ensure that no young person has to resort to sleeping rough, even for a short period of time, or be accommodated in potentially unsuitable settings (for example, with older homeless people with high support needs).

Similarly, B&B accommodation is still widely used for young people, although Wales and Northern Ireland (with England to follow) have imposed limits to reduce this provision. This is a welcome development, but will put more pressure on alternative provision unless preventative initiatives are able to take up this change.

At present, young people frequently have to stay in accommodation that is available, rather than necessarily best suited to meeting their needs, before moving to a more suitable placement later. This exacerbates instability for young people, constraining their ability to 'get on with life', and should be avoided wherever possible.

Overall, there was a lack of clarity at the local and national levels as to the role of temporary accommodation for young people. Within homelessness policy generally, it is agreed that people should spend the shortest time possible in temporary accommodation before accessing permanent housing (e.g. Welsh Assembly Government National Homelessness Strategy 2006–08). However, case study respondents frequently highlighted the positive role of high-quality supported accommodation settings (including, but not limited to, foyers) in providing young people with 'transitional' accommodation where they could acquire life skills. This was regarded as particularly the case for 16–18-year-old (and sometimes older) young people who often needed a supportive environment for a significant period of time before moving onto independent living.

At the same time, providers acknowledged that some young people could lose motivation if they stayed in temporary/transitional accommodation for prolonged periods, particularly if they had an expectation of moving into independent housing. A number of implications arise from this. Although much provision is already differentiated by a number of factors, including length of stay, it is possible that differentiation between temporary and transitional accommodation settings needs to be made clearer. This may in turn assist in moderating young people's expectations of provision and rehousing options. It may also strengthen the potential role of transitional models in assisting young people towards independence. The availability



of local provision also requires attention, as the experience of the foyer movement indicates that, as long as there remains a shortage of alternative accommodation options for young people, 'transitional' accommodation will be forced to fulfil the functions of more emergency, temporary accommodation. At present, there is a lack of evidence as to the benefits of highly 'staged' or 'staircased' provision vis-à-vis utilising one or two more stable placements.

The supported lodgings option represents a new development in transitional accommodation for (potentially) homeless young people (although it has been used for looked after young people for some time). A network of supported lodgings is presently being developed in England and a pilot initiative is being supported in Northern Ireland. However, at present, there is virtually no evidence as to the demand for, and effectiveness of, such provision.

### **Resettlement and tenancy sustainment**

The introduction of Supporting People in 2003 was a key policy success in terms of facilitating the development of provision at a local level to better meet the needs of vulnerably housed households. In particular, Supporting People has led to the establishment of tenancy sustainment services across the UK for all age groups, including young people.

Available evidence indicates that tenancy sustainment services are quite effective at supporting (potentially) homeless households to retain tenancies. Effectiveness here, as well as more generally in services for young people, is influenced centrally by the availability of a reliable key worker – or a 'trusted adult' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2005). Providers were also working towards placing a greater priority on supporting young people's social networks in the community, although young people at the youth consultation did not place as high a priority on this as agency representatives.

However, while tenancy sustainment has improved substantially over the last decade, this has not been matched by improvements in settled housing options for young people. There is a clear need for the creation of affordable housing pathways for young people who are ready to live independently. While housing pathways of all young people have been increasingly constrained over the last decade, young people with more supportive backgrounds do have options via the higher education system and private rented sector. However, affordable housing options for young people on low incomes or benefits, and with limited support, are highly constrained. Within a context of a rationed and small social sector, and a highly differentiated private rented sector, the homelessness system may be one of only a few options

available to young people in many areas of the country. Both agencies and young people wanted to see more 'normal' routes into accommodation available at a local level.

The recent announcements at a national level to increase housing supply (CLG, 2007d; DSD, 2007; Scottish Government, 2007), including within the social sector, were welcomed, although the extent to which this would affect young people was questioned. Providers were increasingly developing (often very innovative) strategies to facilitate young people's access to the private rented sector, although a number of barriers were evident, particularly a lack of affordability given single room rent levels. Providers were also concerned about the association between private tenancies and disincentives to work, with the attendant risk of long-term benefit dependency.

### **Meeting the non-housing needs of young people**

Provision of services for young people with mental health or substance misuse problems has improved significantly in recent years, but a number of barriers continue to constrain utilisation of these – particularly young people's reluctance to seek help for such issues and the unsuitability of many existing services for young people. Agencies called for more 'young person friendly' provision in these areas, thus echoing the Social Exclusion Unit's (2005) call for more therapies tailored to the needs of young people.

The link between homelessness and worklessness has rightly begun to receive greater attention at the policy level. Recent central government reviews have argued that welfare benefits need restructuring (e.g. Scottish Executive, 2002; Department for Social Development, 2007; WAG, 2007). Young people and agencies considered that income benefits should be raised to the level for those over the age of 25, but were particularly concerned with improving opportunities for young people to study and enter work. Young people who were already behind in their education wanted to be able to study full-time without loss of Housing Benefit. The recent announcement that the 16-hour rule for claiming Housing Benefit when studying and living in hostels (DWP/DIUS, 2007) may be changed is therefore welcome (though the transition to settled housing also needs to be considered within this).

One of the most consistently articulated requests by young people was that hostels should lower or remove their charges so that they could enter employment without rendering their current accommodation unaffordable. Previous work (before the implementation of Supporting People) has presented the case for increasing direct subsidies to hostels, thereby reducing rents and Housing Benefit payments, and

thus providing improved work incentives with no net increase in public expenditure (Randall and Brown, 1999).

Government policy is seeking to address the school–work transition for future cohorts of young people by raising the school-leaving age to 18 by 2013 and also increasing apprenticeship placements (90,000 additional places by 2013).<sup>1</sup> However, the extent to which these policies will benefit the most vulnerable young people nationally remains unclear and possible sanctions for non-participation in school, training or work are of concern.<sup>2</sup>

### **Strategic/joint working**

The development of local homelessness strategies represents another significant policy development of the last decade. While young people have received differing levels of attention within them, strategies have nonetheless been crucial in providing an impetus (alongside other developments) to improve joint working in homelessness. Links to other strategies have been achieved to differing extents. There is still scope to strengthen links with children and young people's plans, and considerable scope in other areas such as education. A greater priority within policy on children and young people generally was seen as helpful in progressing these agendas.

Operational joint working between service providers also appeared to have made some significant steps forward in the last five years. In particular, there was evidence of a much more effective and co-ordinated response to meet the needs of young people aged 16 and 17, and those looked after by the local authority (again particularly in the younger age group). However, concerns remained for those aged 18 or over (without children) who had little priority under the strengthened legislation. At the same time, there was considered to be too heavy a reliance on the homelessness legislation for older care leavers (who, it was believed, should be housed without going through this route) and children's services were still sometimes constrained in the extent to which they could respond to non-crisis situations. Provision for offenders aged 18 or over was also seen as more problematic than for the younger age group.

The strategic prioritising of homelessness, along with monitoring, was also seen as improving at both the national and local level. In particular, the introduction of three-year local area agreements between central government and local authorities (and its partners) represents an important opportunity to influence priorities in future homelessness service delivery. Closer government departmental working has been

evident in recent years and this is seen as the route forward to achieve further improvements in joint working in the future.

## **Future priorities: what next?**

The review revealed that there was a widespread consensus within all the UK countries that policy on homelessness generally, and youth homelessness specifically, was moving in the right direction. Government was seen as taking the issue seriously and making important commitments to this area, most specifically via the extension of priority need categories. This positive overall assessment stands in stark contrast to the quite severe critiques of government policy on homelessness ten years ago (Evans, 1996) and represents a strong consensus on which to build future policy.

An important caveat is required to this positive note, however. Young people in the case studies and consultation were less supportive of the direction of policy. They felt that major changes were still required at the national and local level. While most young people do not have the opportunity to consider change over time (apart from where they have been homeless for many years), their views are nonetheless crucial in understanding the meaning and impact of homelessness.

Significant improvements to policies, services and monitoring have been achieved in the last decade. However, youth homelessness still exists on a significant scale. This review highlights the need for future work in a number of key areas:

### **Policy and practice developments**

#### *Early intervention*

- The homelessness preventative agenda needs to be extended further to ensure that earlier interventions are in place at the local level. These should be linked into initiatives such as targeted youth support to ensure that all agencies have a responsibility to identify a full range of risks to young people's well-being.
- In particular, housing providers need to be given a greater role (and associated training) in identifying children at risk of homelessness where possible (rather than at the point of presentation at the local authority, which may be too late).

- Risk assessments should be given a greater priority within the development of preventative services.
- There is a need for a greater focus still on supporting family relationships and wider social networks of (potentially) homeless young people (for those who live at home and those who have left). Within this, policies also need to support young people in their roles as partners and parents (and be gender aware).

### *Addressing homelessness*

- Specialist emergency accommodation for young people should be accessible in every local authority at a level to prevent the need to use bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Local authorities should review their housing options and homelessness procedures to ensure that young people are supported adequately in any approach they make to the authority.
- Consideration needs to be given as to whether a clearer distinction could be made between temporary and transitional accommodation for (potentially) young people at the national and local level.
- Every young person at risk of homelessness or homeless should be allocated a case manager who can provide support, co-ordinate provision and provide continuity until the young person is settled in longer-term housing.
- Policies to improve the recruitment, and retention, of good-quality staff need to be implemented nationally to raise the standards further in the statutory and voluntary sector.
- Specialist support services, particularly therapeutic mental health interventions and drug services able to respond to young people's changing substance use patterns, should continue to be prioritised. The point of transition between children and adult services (in these and other sectors) requires special attention.
- A review should be undertaken to investigate funding regimes that would allow hostels and supported accommodation to charge young people affordable rents to address present work disincentives. In addition, improvements to the benefit system (including the 16-hour rule) should be given a high priority.

- Innovative policies designed to increase the income available to young people and reduce affordability issues should be explored (for example, work with employers, self-build, etc.).
- A review of sustainable housing options for young people in the private rented sector is required, given its increased role in housing young people across the UK. More generally, more formal arrangements are required with social and private landlords to support move-on policies at a local level.
- Much legislative change and policy developments in homelessness and related children's services have focused on the younger age group. The position of 18–24 year olds, particularly those who fall outside statutory responsibilities, has been neglected and requires a much greater policy focus.
- Joint protocols on youth homelessness need to consider the needs of all groups of (potentially) homeless young people.
- Homelessness (and the mainstreaming of effective interventions) should be given a high priority in reviews of local area agreements.
- Joined-up government needs to continue to force the pace on more effective joint working at a local level, particularly between children's services and housing.

### *Monitoring and research*

- The evidence base on the outcomes of youth homelessness preventative and accommodation-based interventions needs to be strengthened. In particular, a robustly evaluated pilot of supported lodgings should be undertaken before services are rolled out nationally.
- Research is needed to explain the disproportionately high levels of youth homelessness among black British young people in London.
- Data collected at local authority level on homelessness preventions could be improved further (for example, the addition of age categories and whether households fall into the priority need categories).
- The patterns, and definitions, of 'rough sleeping' among young people require further inquiry.

- The monitoring of non-statutory youth homelessness requires further development, including information on throughput and repeat presentations.
- The effectiveness of present processes of consultations with (potentially) homeless young people should be reviewed and recommendations made to improve their focus and representativeness.



# Notes

## Chapter 1

1. Via the Homelessness Act 2002 (for England and Wales) and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
2. For example, in Northern Ireland, the Housing Order (Northern Ireland) 1988 relating to homelessness included young people 'at risk of sexual or financial exploitation'. In England, young people could be 'at risk in a variety of ways' but young people should not be treated as vulnerable on their age alone (DoE, Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, 1993, para. 6.9).
3. England – Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002); Wales – Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001); and Scotland – Homelessness Etc. (Scotland) Act 2003.
4. While data is not available, it should also be noted that England defines people aged 21 who are 'vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered', as a priority need group, whereas Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not.
5. Homelessness Etc. (Scotland) Act 2003. There will be an exception for intentionally homeless households.
6. Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006.
7. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 placed a duty on social work departments to accommodate 16 and 17 year olds, as well as a power to accommodate 18–20 year olds who had previously been looked after. In England and Wales, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 transferred responsibility for financial support to local authority social service departments for eligible young people from April 2001 (financial responsibility did not transfer in Scotland until 2004). The Leaving Care (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 established joint commissioning with the Department of Social Development for homeless young people leaving care aged 16–17 years.

## Chapter 2

1. Office for National Statistics, see [www.statistics.gov.uk/](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/).
2. Lets to 'other homeless households' are recorded *separately from* and in *addition to* housing association lets to statutorily homeless households.
3. 'Single homeless with support needs', 'homeless families with support needs' and 'people sleeping rough'.
4. Homelessness status is not always recorded within SPCR; in 2005–06, the status of 21 per cent of service users was not recorded.
5. That is, a record of how many services were provided and to which groups of people, but not an actual record of the individuals using Supporting People services. Individual records could not be examined because National Insurance numbers are used to differentiate between individuals and these data could not be transferred to CHP for data protection reasons.
6. That is, an estimated 46 per cent of the 48,000 non-statutorily homeless service users were aged 16–24.
7. This is necessary because there is not full data on age range and homelessness status. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/23141000/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/23141000/0); and <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/research/supportpeople?lang=en>.
8. See [www.spclientrecord.org.uk/](http://www.spclientrecord.org.uk/).
9. CORE data on households that are statutorily homeless is not employed here, as these households are recorded in P1E statistics.
10. [www.broadwaylondon.org/broadwayvoice/index.asp](http://www.broadwaylondon.org/broadwayvoice/index.asp).
11. Leicester Outreach Team, data supplied to researchers.
12. ECHO monitoring report, April 2003 to March 2006.
13. County Durham Initiative to Monitor Homelessness and Supported Accommodation Needs, data supplied to researchers by Centrepoint.

14. In large part, this is because their temporary accommodation does not approach the levels seen in London and the South East of England.
15. In England, there is evidence that young families are likely to be placed in self-contained temporary accommodation (Pleace *et al.*, 2008).
16. Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive, [www.nihe.gov.uk/news/news.asp?Id=1134](http://www.nihe.gov.uk/news/news.asp?Id=1134).
17. This is the pattern of service use among 16–24 year olds who were non-statutorily homeless households in England during 2005–06 (74 per cent supported housing (including direct access accommodation), 14 per cent floating support and 12 per cent other services) according to SPCR data.
18. This estimate includes young people in various forms of (temporary) supported housing. It excludes young people who were rehoused but still receiving floating support services and those at risk of homelessness and receiving preventative floating support services.
19. See I. Anderson, European Observatory on Homelessness: statistics, 'Update 2006 United Kingdom report to FEANTSA European Observatory on Homelessness', [www.feantsa.org/code/en/hp.asp](http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/hp.asp).
20. See I. Anderson, European Observatory on Homelessness: statistics, 'Update 2006 United Kingdom report to FEANTSA European Observatory on Homelessness', [www.feantsa.org/code/en/hp.asp](http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/hp.asp). A count of people sleeping rough was conducted in Wales in March 2007, but the results are not yet available.
21. [www.broadwaylondon.org/broadwayvoice/policy/Street\\_to\\_Home\\_AR0506.pdf](http://www.broadwaylondon.org/broadwayvoice/policy/Street_to_Home_AR0506.pdf).
22. The guidance to the homelessness legislation of the time said: 'Young people (aged 16 or over) should not automatically be treated as vulnerable on the basis of age alone. Young people could be "at risk" in a variety of ways. Risks could arise from violence or sexual abuse at home, the likelihood of drug or alcohol abuse or prostitution. Some groups of young people will be less able to fend for themselves than others, particularly for example: those leaving local authority care, juvenile offenders (including those discharged from young offender institutions), those who have been sexually or physically abused, those with learning difficulties and those who have been subject of statements of special educational need. These examples are not meant to constitute a complete list' (DoE, Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, 1993, para. 6.9).

23. The Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Scotland) Order 1997.
24. Following the legislative change in England, approximately 5,000 more young homeless people were accepted as homeless in new priority need categories compared to earlier years, until acceptances began to fall back in 2004–05. This has been allowed for in the estimates produced for 1997–98 to 2001–02 (i.e. they are 5,000 less than they would be based solely on projections from the available 2005–06 and 2006–07 data on 16–24 year-olds).
25. There is some missing data in this data set, as 19 per cent of local housing authorities did not provide supplementary information (and the response rate in London was only 61 per cent).
26. It is important to note that these households were not current asylum seekers who are ineligible for assistance under the homeless person legislation, but were instead former asylum seekers with a recognised refugee or related status, or British Citizenship.

### Chapter 3

1. These (self-reported) figures may be an underestimate of the prevalence of problematic drug use among young homeless people, given the tendency for young people to consider their drug use to be recreational rather than problematic (see Chapter 4).
2. Harassment is a reason for homelessness for a small proportion of young people in all countries (for example, Table 15).
3. Young people are considered to be NEET if they are unemployed, looking after a family (including informal care of adults as well as children), disabled, in part-time education (but not part-time work), or otherwise not active in the labour market. See Godfrey *et al.* (2002).
4. These journeys are illustrative and cannot be presumed to be typical. Young people taking part in the youth consultation were invited to participate by agencies and may have been on better trajectories than some of their peers. Nonetheless, the maps demonstrate the potential for moving out of homelessness.

## Chapter 4

1. Please note that the number of service 'interventions' relates to the number of separate uses of each service by young people (so a stay by a young person for one night in a night shelter represents one service intervention, as does where a young person stays in a foyer for nine months).

## Chapter 5

1. The research involved an online survey of all English local authorities with a response rate of 60 per cent (212 out of 354 authorities). The information on youth homelessness strategies was not included in the report.
2. This issue has been subject to recent detailed research (Pleace *et al.*, 2007b).
3. Though more detailed research in this area did raise a key disadvantage of single assessments where it means that a service user, perhaps with poor experience of one provider, is unable to then apply afresh to another agency. Problems such as poor behaviour in one project can therefore act as a barrier to accessing support from another (Pleace and Quilgars, 2002).
4. *Inside Housing*, 7 September 2007, p. 2.

## Chapter 6

1. Speech on expansion of apprenticeships by Gordon Brown, 28 January 2008, [www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page14414.asp](http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page14414.asp).
2. For example, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) press release, 18 February 2008, 'Work for your money: getting NEETs into employment', [www.dwp.gov.uk/](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/).

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# Appendix 1: Research methods

The study involved three key elements:

- a desk-based review of the evidence base on youth homelessness across the UK;
- case studies in six local authorities across the UK;
- a national consultation exercise.

The process of, and number of participants involved within, each of these elements is described below.

## Desk-based review

A desk-based review of the research and secondary analysis of statistics available on youth homelessness over the last ten years was undertaken to provide a state-of-the-art profile of the nature, scale and trends in youth homelessness across the whole of the UK. It involved a review of literature, secondary analysis of data on the scale of youth homelessness and reanalysis of the recent Community and Local Government survey – ‘CLG survey’ – of statutory homeless families and 16–17 year olds.

## Literature review

This element comprised a critical review of all of the research published on youth homelessness in the UK since 1996. This was tightly focused on the key research questions, and designed to draw on and synthesise (rather than duplicate) existing resources.

The literature review was defined by the following parameters:

- time period: 1996–2007;
- geographical remit: UK;



- population of interest: young people aged 16–24; all household types (single young people, couples, those with and without children); statutory and non-statutory homeless young people (including those sleeping rough, living in hostels or other supported accommodation, staying temporarily with friends/relatives, or in intolerable or overcrowded housing conditions).

Key sources consulted included:

- subject-specific resources – e.g. the JRF/CRASH database on homelessness research ([www.crashindex.org.uk](http://www.crashindex.org.uk)) and the Resource Information Service (RIS) directory of homelessness publications ([www.homelesspages.org.uk](http://www.homelesspages.org.uk));
- social science databases – e.g. Social Sciences Citation Index, Sociological Abstracts, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, and System for Information on Grey Literature;
- targeted search of key websites to identify recent literature and policy documents relating to youth homelessness – including government departments and agencies (e.g. Communities and Local Government, Social Exclusion Unit, Scottish Executive), research organisations (e.g. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, London Housing Foundation) and voluntary sector and allied organisations (e.g. Homeless Link, Shelter, Crisis, Scottish Council for Single Homeless, Centrepont, Foyer Federation, NCH, etc.).

### **Secondary analysis of data on the scale of youth homelessness**

Existing data was interrogated to examine evidence of changes in the scale of youth homelessness and to gather information on the profile of young homeless people. Trends over the course of the past decade were examined wherever possible.

Data sources consulted included:

- *P1E* provides a headcount of 16–17 year-olds, 18–20 year-old care leavers accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need. P1E also records applicants (head of household) aged between 16 and 24 accepted as statutorily homeless in each local authority in England.<sup>1</sup> It also records some data on households in temporary accommodation and is collected on a quarterly basis.
- *WHO-12* provides very similar data for Welsh authorities, though priority needs groups differ slightly from England;

- The *Northern Ireland Homelessness Statistics* provide a headcount of young people accepted as statutorily homeless, though priority needs groups differ from England and Wales
- Scottish *HL1* data provides far more detailed information than that collated elsewhere on young people found statutorily homeless. Rather than headcounts, there are individual records on each household accepted, including age, gender, household composition and housing outcomes, at local authority level.<sup>2</sup> Priority needs groups again differ from other parts of the UK.
- The *CORE statistics* cover new lets made by housing associations. They record both the statutorily homeless households that housing associations have housed (also recorded in P1E) *and* the lets provided to households that housing associations themselves determine to be non-statutorily homeless. *SCORE* provides the same data for Scotland.
- The *Supporting People Client Record* (SPCR) for England is completed by service providers funded by Supporting People. It provides details on hostel stays and use of floating support services by statutorily homeless young people. These data overlap with P1E and the CORE statistics. The SPCR also allows service providers to record other households as being ‘non-statutorily homeless’.
- Local authorities may produce estimates of rough sleeping and squatting in their area, but the means of doing so vary. Young people recorded in these counts may also appear in counts conducted in other areas, or in other statistics (e.g. if they are in contact with a Supporting People service or are later accepted as homeless).

### **Reanalysis of CLG survey of statutory homeless families and 16–17 year olds**

Communities and Local Government generously agreed that data from their recent survey of statutory homeless families and 16–17 year olds in England – conducted by CHP in partnership with BMRB – could be reanalysed for the purposes of this review.

This enabled detailed examination of the characteristics and experiences of two groups of young homeless people, these being:

- 16–24 year olds from the main family survey – who were accepted as homeless (intentionally or unintentionally), eligible for assistance and in priority need

because they were pregnant or had a dependent child (789 respondents from a total sample, of all ages, of 2,053);

- young people accepted as homeless 16 or 17 year olds – those eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need because they were 16 or 17 years of age at date of application (all 350 respondents in the original survey dataset).

The sample population was all 16–17 year olds and an adult representative of each homeless family (here filtered to include 16–24 year olds only) that was accepted by English authorities as being owed the main homelessness duty between 1 January 2005 and 30 June 2005. Full details of the survey methodology and analysis, and its overall findings, are provided in Pleace *et al.* (2008).

### Case studies

Six case studies across the UK (three in England and one in each of the other three countries) were conducted to illustrate the impact of different national as well as local policy developments on young homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

Areas were selected because they were known to have a significant incidence of youth homelessness, offered a reasonable level and range of services for young homeless people, exhibited evidence of good practice in responding to youth homelessness and, furthermore, had varied profiles in terms of ethnicity, degree of rurality/urbanity and levels of housing demand, etc. The six areas that were selected and agreed to participate were:

- Belfast (Northern Ireland);
- Edinburgh (Scotland);
- Lambeth (England);
- Leicester (England);
- Sedgefield (England);
- Swansea (Wales).

A profile of each of the case study areas is provided in Appendix 2.

In each case study, fieldwork involved:

- compilation of relevant local *policies, research and statistics* (e.g. strategy documents, service evaluations, joint protocol agreements and statutory homelessness data);
- interviews and focus groups with *statutory agency representatives* involved in strategic planning, commissioning and operational practice relating to youth homelessness (e.g. Housing Options/Executive, Supporting People, Connexions, youth offending teams, etc.);
- interviews and focus groups with *voluntary sector representatives* involved in the delivery of services for young homeless people (e.g. managers and front-line staff of temporary accommodation, mediation schemes, move-on housing, floating support, homelessness umbrella agencies, etc.);
- focus groups and interviews with *young people* who were homeless, had recently been homeless, or were at risk of homelessness (including those who were classified as being within, and outside, priority need groups).

In total, the six cases studies involved interviews and/or focus groups with:

- 52 statutory agency representatives;
- 69 voluntary sector representatives;
- 148 young people (including 30 focus groups and three individual interviews).

## **National consultation exercise**

The final element of the review involved a national-level consultation exercise with young people, policy-makers and practitioners.

### **Young people's consultation**

Held in June 2007, the first event brought together 12 young people (nine men and three women) representing all four countries of the UK. They were given an opportunity to learn about the research and to participate in a number of activities including discussion sessions, construction of timelines of significant events in their lives that contributed to their homelessness (included in the report as 'young people's journeys') and consideration of the policies they would develop to alleviate youth homelessness in an 'If I were Prime Minister' scenario.

All young people were accompanied by a support worker, eight of whom agreed to take part in a separate focus group on the day. This provided an opportunity for the comparison of the characteristics and support needs of young homeless people in each country, and the experiences of front-line workers in their endeavours to address youth homelessness in the different legislative and policy contexts.

A second event, attended by seven young people (three men and four women), was held in December 2007. This gave participants an opportunity to comment on the preliminary findings of the research, and discuss what they considered to be the most important implications for policy and practice.

### **Policy-maker and practitioner consultation**

Policy-makers and practitioners from throughout the UK were invited to a consultation event in January 2008. The event – entitled 'Policy directions in youth homelessness: a roundtable discussion' – was attended by 22 individuals representing a range of voluntary sector and statutory bodies (including central government departments) within each of the four countries. Following a presentation of the preliminary research findings, participants were asked to comment on the key messages arising from the study and to identify future policy opportunities to address youth homelessness.

### **Notes**

1. The analysis presented here is based on grossed data, which includes estimates for non-responding authorities.
2. The analysis presented here is based on reported data, which does not include estimates for missing data.

## Appendix 2: Case study profiles

### Belfast (Northern Ireland)

Belfast is the largest city in Northern Ireland but also has a considerable rural hinterland. Unlike England, Scotland and Wales, Northern Ireland has no local housing authorities. Rather, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive provides social housing across the country, operating in five geographical areas (one of those covering Belfast) out of 37 local district offices. There is one central homelessness strategy, with five local homelessness plans developed through an analysis of local needs.

The numbers of households accepted as statutorily homeless in Northern Ireland had increased from 4,319 in 1995–96 to 9,749 in 2005–06. Consistent with this trend, the numbers of 18–25-year-old single people had also doubled over this period, although the numbers of 16–17 year olds accepted had fluctuated but not increased overall. Belfast had the greatest youth homelessness problem in the country, as well as the largest number of services for this group.

Under a Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) initiative, the Department for Social Development has recently undertaken a cross-departmental and cross-sectoral review of homelessness. The report includes a detailed action plan, including proposals for legislative changes. Of particular relevance here is the likely extension of priority need categories, as 16–17 year olds are not currently automatically accepted as statutorily homeless.

### Edinburgh (Scotland)

Edinburgh has experienced a ‘capital city’ effect in terms of inward migration, with increasing population size combined with a buoyant economy. High levels of owner-occupation for Scotland (70 per cent) exist alongside a larger private rented sector (14 per cent) and diminishing social stock (16 per cent) – with increasing property prices and a widening gap between house prices and wage levels. Homelessness presentations increased from 3,578 in 1996–97 to 5,438 in 2006–07. In 2006–07, 6 per cent of presentations were from 16–17 year olds (down from 18 per cent eight years ago) and 30 per cent of presentations were from those aged 18–24 (up from 24 per cent eight years ago).

The Edinburgh Homelessness Strategy 2002–07 had four main aims: homelessness prevention; ending rough sleeping; ensuring that services reduce the damaging effects of homelessness; and integrated approaches. Young people were among a number of groups of homeless people identified as in need of specialist services. Scheduled developments included a housing education programme; inclusion of a Young Persons' Service within the Neighbourhood Support Teams; appointment of two specialist young people's workers in the central team; implementation of a Through Care and After Care Strategy; and 20 furnished tenancies for those previously looked after. All of these have now been established.

Alongside a proactive approach by the council, Edinburgh has a range of voluntary sector hostel and supported accommodation provision for young people. A mediation service for young people has recently been established and one of the main providers for homeless young people manages the Scottish Social Networks Forum. Presently, there are no supported lodgings or foyers in the city. The council also has a number of temporary accommodation facilities, but the supply of these is insufficient to meet demand. Thus bed and breakfast is still used to accommodate young homeless people.

### **Lambeth (England)**

Lambeth is London's most populous borough. It is home to the greatest number of teenagers and contains some of the more extreme pockets of deprivation within the capital. It is ethnically diverse, with 38 per cent of the population being from black and minority ethnic communities.

Lambeth recorded the highest absolute number of 16–20-year-old acceptances in England in 2005–06. Acceptance levels for homeless 16–17 year olds have been among the highest recorded within the capital, accounting for 14 per cent of all accepted households in 2006–07 (compared with 10 per cent in London and 8 per cent in England). However, the number of 16–17-year-old acceptances dropped by 40 per cent between 2005–06 and 2006–07 (from 178 to 106) after implementation of a more proactive prevention-focused approach. Nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) of the 457 16–17 year olds presenting as homeless between January and October 2007 were from a minority ethnic background.

Social housing shortages are extreme in Lambeth and young homeless people often face lengthy waits to access temporary accommodation. Nevertheless, there are a wide range of services available for young homeless people in the borough, including: a family support service (for all 16–17 year olds presenting as homeless),



mediation, hostels, a foyer, pre-tenancy training and tenancy sustainment services, as well as supported accommodation for young mothers and infants.

A dedicated youth homelessness strategy was drafted in 2007 to accompany the general Lambeth Homelessness Strategy 2005–10 and a number of new initiatives were at various stages of development when case study fieldwork was conducted. These included: a community host (supported lodgings) scheme for black 16–17 year olds; short-term ‘Time-out’ accommodation for 16–17 year olds; and a professionally produced DVD challenging common misconceptions about youth homelessness, to be used in schools. Plans to develop a support programme for the parents of young people were also under consideration.

## **Leicester (England)**

Leicester is the tenth largest city in England with a population of more than 250,000 people. A high percentage of its population is from black and minority ethnic groups (estimated at 36 per cent in 2001). More than 50 per cent of the city’s population live in areas classified among the 10 per cent most deprived in the country.

Over a three-year period (2003–06), Leicester’s homelessness acceptances reduced from 716 to 292 households (41 per cent of 2003 figures). More specifically, the numbers of young people (aged 16 and 17 or 18–20 care leavers) reduced from 81 in 2003 to 18 in 2006 (22 per cent of 2003 figures).

Leicester has been identified as one of the National Youth Homelessness Scheme’s regional centres of excellence (see Chapter 1), giving it scope to improve local capacity to prevent and tackle youth homelessness and share knowledge/experiences with other authorities and agencies.

Local authority in-house provision includes four hostels for single people and childless couples (within which 24 per cent of residents are under 25 years), one of which is the Dawn Centre, which incorporates primary health care services, mental health services, a day centre and an outreach team. A fifth hostel has recently been converted from an all-age hostel into a hostel for young people only. Leicester also has several supported housing schemes, an extensive generic floating support service and a pre-tenancy training pilot programme – all of which may be accessed by young people. A number of inter-agency forums tackling homelessness operate in the city, including sub-groups for targeted clientele, such as the Young Persons’ Forum ‘high-risk and move-on sub-group’.

## **Sedgefield (England)**

Sedgefield is one of seven districts in County Durham. It is a predominately rural authority with a population of 88,000, with the majority of its residents living in one of four small towns: Newton Aycliffe, Spennymoor, Ferryhill and Shildon. It has a manufacturing base twice that of the national average. It was ranked 55 out of 344 English local authorities on the 2004 Indices of Deprivation.

Homelessness acceptances have reduced sharply over the last three years from 441 in 2004–05 to 118 in 2006–07. This has been achieved mainly through the preventative agenda, with the local authority recording 180 cases where homelessness was prevented in 2006–07. Nineteen people aged 16 and 17 were accepted as homeless in 2006–07 compared to 58 in 2004–05.

The Housing Advice and Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2007–10 identifies five key objectives: preventing homelessness; support for people who are vulnerable; tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness; sustaining reductions in rough sleeping; and providing more settled homes. Sedgefield Borough Council is part of the County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership, which has been responsible for the development of the Countywide Joint Protocol for 16 and 17 year olds and the commissioning of a county-wide mediation service.

Sedgefield Borough employs five housing support officers, one based in each of five geographically based Integrated Teams for Vulnerable Adults (as well as a Senior Homeless Persons Officer based centrally). Sedgefield was one of the first authorities to develop a joint protocol for young people in the early 2000s and classed 16 and 17 year olds as priority need before the legislative change. Sedgefield is a member of the County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership, which has been responsible for the development of a county-wide protocol for 16 and 17 year olds, as well as a mediation service. There is only one supported accommodation provider within the Sedgefield boundaries and two floating support providers.

## **Swansea (Wales)**

Swansea has the third highest population of the 22 Welsh unitary authorities, at 226,000. The county extends to 146 square miles, with the City of Swansea surrounded by a rural hinterland.

Swansea has the second highest incidence of homelessness in Wales (after Cardiff), with 175 priority need acceptances (July to September 2006), 44 per cent of whom were aged 16–24 (10 per cent aged 16–17). Statistics show a steady rise in acceptances in the last decade.

A dedicated youth homelessness strategy was devised for 2000–03 and, although youth homelessness has more recently been integrated in the generic City and Council of Swansea Homeless Strategy 2003–08, the needs of this group retain a high profile. Dedicated youth homelessness forums and working groups exist at both strategic and operational levels.

The assessment of all 16–21-year-old homeless people (without dependent children) and care leavers has been contracted out to the voluntary sector. Swansea is unique within Wales in that 16- and 17-year-old applicants are, without exception, regarded as ‘children in need’ under the Children Act. In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government has recently imposed a two- to six-week maximum on bed and breakfast stays for 16 and 17 year olds (effective as of April 2007).

Swansea offers a wide range of specialist services for young homeless people, including a hostel for 16–21 year olds, a foyer, supported lodgings, mediation, supported accommodation, post-resettlement support and a service supporting young homeless families. Young people may also access a range of other generic homelessness services, such as hostels, housing advice, rent deposit scheme, etc.

