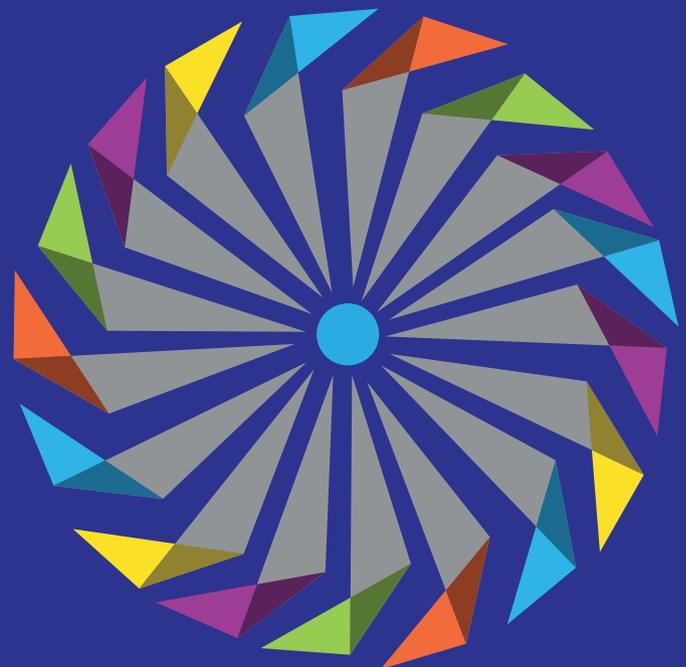




youth homeless north east
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Youth Homelessness in the North East

Survey Report 2018



Report by Dr Adele Irving,
Senior Lecturer in Criminology
at Northumbria University

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciation to The Millfield House Foundation for their continued support and contribution to our work including conducting the annual survey of youth homelessness in the north east.

Thank you to Homeless Link for their support. The survey was originally set up with the support of Homeless to align our regional survey with the national 'Young and Homeless' survey to ensure compatibility of data. Although the YHNE survey has been adapted over time it still largely comparable.

We are grateful once more to Dr Adele Irving, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Science and Languages at Northumbria University, for her contribution in developing the survey questions, for the depth of data analysis and writing of the report.

Our thanks also go to our voluntary and community sector partners, local authorities and housing associations who take the time to complete the survey. This has been a particularly challenging year for local authorities who are implementing the new systems and processes required under the Homelessness Reduction Act, so we are very grateful to those who contributed and hope to have all twelve authorities in 2019.



**Millfield House
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Executive Summary

Research Overview

In March 2018, Youth Homeless North East (YHNE) conducted its annual survey into youth homelessness in the North East for the seventh year running. Each year, the research aims to establish the nature, extent and causes of youth homelessness in the region and to identify how the wider social, political and economic context is impacting on the experiences of young people, as well as levels and the nature of service provision. This year, responses were received from nine local authorities and eleven housing associations and homelessness service providers.

Summary of Key Findings

- Looking at the regional picture as a whole, this year's findings suggest a slight decrease in the number of young people accepted as homeless. Considering individual local authority responses, however, there was significant disparity in the number of youth homeless acceptances and the proportion of total acceptances accounted for by young people. This will account for the mixed perceptions of respondents about the changing scale of youth homelessness in the region over time.
- Almost 400 young people were reported to have sought housing advice and support in February 2018. Again, there were mixed opinions about the changing scale of requests over time.
- Tension within familial relationships and subsequent relationship breakdown is reaffirmed as the dominant cause of youth homelessness in the region, with problems of financial difficulty and eviction being less prominent than in previous years.
- The most commonly reported characteristics of the young people who sought or accessed support from respondents were those aged 16-17, young parents/pregnant young people and care leavers.
- Support for care leavers is a key priority for local authorities and providers. Positively, eight of nine local authorities (89%) confirmed the availability of a range of longer-term support options for care leavers up until the age of 25.
- Offending backgrounds and being part of the LGBT community were infrequently reported but are likely to be under-estimated.
- Experiences of rough sleeping among young people were said to be infrequent and stable. This compares favourably to the national picture where rough sleeping among homeless young people is more common and increasing.
- Lack of independent living and relationship skills, not being in education, training or employment and mental health problems were cited as most common among young clients by providers. Problems of substance misuse seem to be less widespread than in previous years.
- In February 2018 alone, roughly one third of young people being supported by providers were said to have been formally diagnosed as having mental health problems. Very few were engaging with necessary support services.
- Complex needs among young people were also reported as common, but the complexity of their needs – while high – may be stabilising.

- A wide range of practical support continues to be offered by providers and has increased in some cases. But, the availability of external services and youth specific services across the region appears to be ever-decreasing.
- A total of 93 positive prevention actions were reported during February 2018, suggesting a potential increase in prevention efforts by local authorities. Nonetheless, a third judged that they did not have an adequate range of homelessness prevention services available in their area at this time.
- Most local authorities assessed joint working between Housing and Children's Services for 16 and 17 year olds as 'effective' or 'very effective'. But some working arrangements are being reviewed.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into force in April 2018. The principles of the HRA are welcome. But respondents are cautiously optimistic about the likely impacts of the Act on youth homelessness, the impact is uncertain, due to pre-existing prevention efforts and its resource implications.
- While a range of temporary and longer-stay accommodation options are available across the region and have increased in some parts since the previous survey, this provision is likely to become more squeezed – while ever more integral – in light of the HRA.
- The most common move-on destinations for young homeless people leaving services are local authority owned housing and entry into the Private Rented Sector (PRS). This contrasts with the national picture, where returning to the family home is most common.
- Overall, respondents were highly confident, very confident or confident in the quality of move-on accommodation for young homeless people in their areas. But, the move-on housing options available to young people continue to be undermined by welfare reform. Delays to Universal Credit payments and the temporary ending of Housing Benefit for some young people aged 18-21 have affected the homelessness preventative agenda, key drivers of homelessness and young people's ability to move out of homelessness.
- Long-standing but ever-present problems of housing affordability and the limited employment opportunities in the North East are also impacting on young people's housing options.

Introduction

Research Overview

This report outlines the findings of the seventh year of Youth Homeless North East's (YHNE) annual survey of youth homelessness. Over the past seven years, the survey has aimed to establish the nature, extent and causes of youth homelessness in the North East and identify how the wider social, political and economic context is impacting on the experiences of young people and levels and the nature of service provision over time. A sizeable body of data has now been collected and critically, reveals that youth homelessness continues to be ever-present within the North East, as young people are affected by changing social, political and economic challenges.

In 2018, the key questions explored through the research were:

- How many young people are homeless in the North East?
- What are the main causes of youth homelessness?
- How many homeless young people have had adverse life experiences?
- What are the primary needs of homeless young people in the region?
- What homelessness prevention, accommodation and support services are in place to assist vulnerable young people and how effective are these?
- How is the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 impacting upon the support available to homeless young people?
- What should be the region's future strategic and operational objectives in respect of youth homelessness?

Going forward, we hope that the findings of this report are useful in informing regional policy and practice.

Methodology

This year's research was carried out through two online surveys: one tailored to local authorities and one to homelessness agencies and housing associations (collectively referred to as 'providers' in this report). The surveys largely reflect those used by Homeless Link's (2018) 'Young and Homeless' research, which looks at the nature of youth homelessness in England each year. This is to ensure that the regional and national data collected are comparable.

The surveys consisted of a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions and asked for information relating to single homeless people, aged 16-24. Furthermore, it focused on two timeframes: February 2018 for snapshot figures and the previous 12 months for the assessment of changes over time. Nine responses were received from local authorities. Eleven responses were received from providers. Of these, seven (78%) reported being specialist youth homelessness organisations. Providers came from all parts of the region. Not all respondents answered every survey question, so baseline figures are given for the findings presented. The smaller the baseline (denoted by 'n'), the fewer respondents received and the less confident we can be that the findings are representative of the picture in the North East. Individual responses have been anonymised within the finding. Where relevant, comparisons are made between regional and national figures and figures from previous regional surveys.

Survey Findings

The Extent of Youth Homelessness

The myriad of definitions of homelessness, the absence of a mandatory and robust approach to measuring homelessness and its often 'hidden' nature, make quantifying and monitoring homelessness challenging and of course, in the absence of accurate measurement, it is more difficult to urge governments to meet the needs of homeless people (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1992). As an attempt to understand the scale of youth homelessness at the regional level, however, the survey results point to a gradual decrease in the scale of youth homelessness in the North East over time. Nine local authorities indicated that in February 2018, just 35 young single people between the ages of 16-24 were accepted as homeless. This compares favourably to the number of youth presentations accepted as homeless in the month of February in previous years (see Irving, 2016, 2017). The regional findings can be broadly considered to conflict with national trends, whereby a gradual increase in statutory homelessness among young people has been suggested (Homeless Link, 2018).

The findings also point, however, to a degree of variation in the number of young people accepted as homeless across different local authority areas and the proportion of acceptances accounted for by young people. In some areas, no young people were said to have been accepted as homeless in February 2018, while another reported a figure of 21. This is likely to account for the mixed perceptions from local authorities about the changing scale of youth homelessness in their areas over time. Indeed, four of eight local authority respondents who answered the question (50%) reported that youth homelessness had increased in their area since February 2017, while two (25%) reported decreases. Two (25%) were unable to comment on the changing scale of youth homelessness in their area over a 12 month period. Where the number of acceptances were reported to have decreased, this was attributed to effective homelessness prevention efforts. Increases were attributed to ongoing structural challenges in respect of welfare policy and housing affordability, as per national findings (Homeless Link, 2018). All of these topics are discussed later in the report.

Meanwhile, 388 young people were reported to have sought housing advice and support in February 2018. Again, there was variation in the reported scale of requests across the region and accordingly, mixed views among respondents about how the scale of requests had changed over time. Of eight local authority respondents who answered the question, four (50%) said the number of young people seeking housing advice and support had decreased compared to February 2017, three (37.5%) said it had increased and one (12.5%) reported no change. Generally speaking though, there were reports that even where changes were reported, they were not significant.

Eleven providers reported that 278 young people were accessing support from their service in February 2018. This data signifies ongoing demand for services. But little could be deduced from the data about changes for demand in support over time.

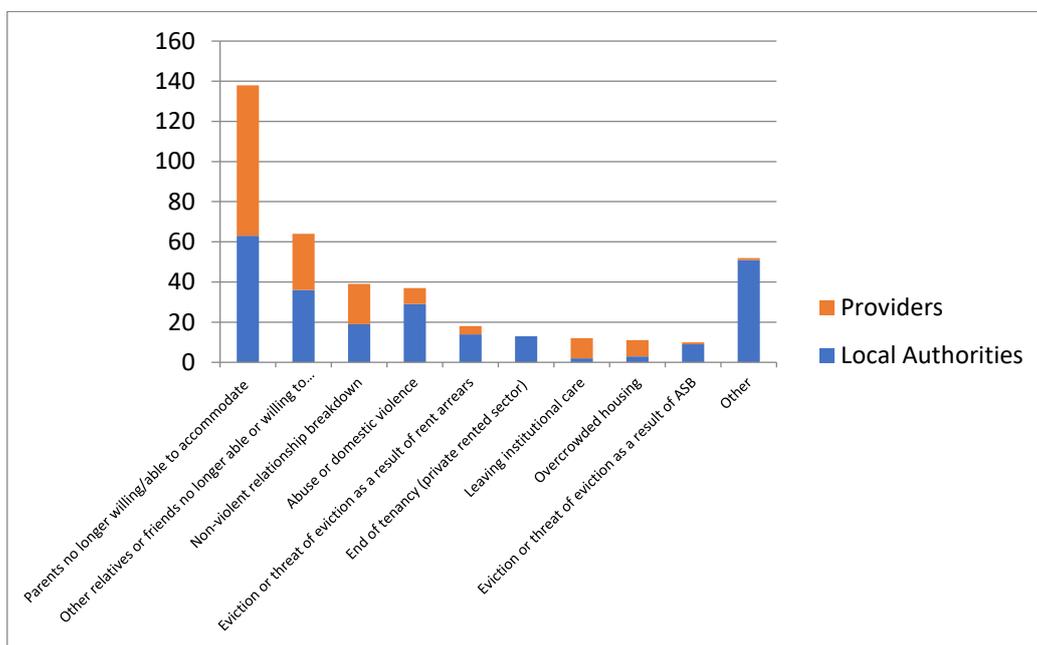
The Causes of Youth Homelessness

Both local authorities and providers were asked about the reasons for homelessness among the young people engaged with in February 2018. Local authorities were asked about those

who presented as homeless, while providers were asked about the young people who they had supported. The prevalence of each cause of homelessness is shown in the figure below. Reflecting long-standing trends, parents no longer being willing or able to accommodate young people was by far the most common cause of youth homelessness, followed by relationship breakdown with other relatives or friends, non-violent relationship breakdown and abuse/domestic violence.

Interestingly, therefore, was the prevalence of tension and stress within a variety of relationship types as a cause of homelessness and the less significant role of eviction as a result of rent arrears and ASB as causes of homelessness than reported in previous years.

Figure 1: The Causes of Homelessness among Young People Engaged with in February 2018



Where parents were no longer willing or able to accommodate young people, the most frequently cited reasons for this were relationship breakdown with a parent, step-parent or other family member and financial reasons. The findings thus suggest that substance misuse and/or violence perpetrated by the young people are less significant factors in relationship breakdown than in previous years (see Irving, 2017).

Of all the factors discussed, sexual orientation – a new issue covered by the survey – was least prevalent. Research has identified, however, that LGBT youths are over-represented in the homeless population, yet significantly under-reported (Rosario, 2012; TUC, 2016). It is also possible that this factor could have been captured within the broader relationship breakdown categories or may have been under-reported or recorded.

Young People's Experiences

All respondents were asked about the broad characteristics of young people who accessed support in February 2018. In the case of local authorities, the question asked was about the categories of young people applying as homeless in February 2018. For the housing associations and homelessness providers, the question was how many young people in each category had been supported during that month. The questions were, therefore, slightly different and there is likely to be an element of double counting.

Table 21 The Characteristics of Young People with Housing Needs who Accessed Support in February 2018

Characteristics	Local Authorities	Providers	Total
Young people aged 16-17	17	84	101
Young parents / pregnant young people	46	36	82
Care leavers	1	59	60
Looked after young people aged 16-17	0	43	43
Young people with an offending background	3	39	42
LGBT	4	17	21

As can be seen through Table 1, the most commonly reported characteristics of the young people referred to were those aged 16-17, young parents/pregnant young people and care leavers. It is interesting to note the increased prominence of parenthood among young people with a housing need within the survey over time. Several respondents commented on the development of bespoke opportunities available to young parents, such as tenancy training, and the successful outcomes associated with these.

The number of young people requiring support in the region from the looked after care and care leavers is an ongoing area of concern. Having said this, support for care leavers has been a key priority for local authorities and providers across the region for many years. In 2018, eight of nine local authorities (89%) confirmed the availability of longer-term support options for care leavers up until the age of 25. This includes the availability of consistent personal advisors for young people within local authority teams, close partnership working with social landlords and priority banding to support care leavers to access decent and affordable accommodation and pre and post tenancy support (including support with independent living skills). There were also reports of local authorities working with external organisations to provide care leavers with necessary support, but the specific nature of the support offer was not disclosed.

Offending backgrounds and being part of the LGBT community were among the least common characteristics discussed. But, as discussed above, their prevalence is likely to be under-reported. Critically also, several respondents reported that this information is not routinely recorded via their IT systems.

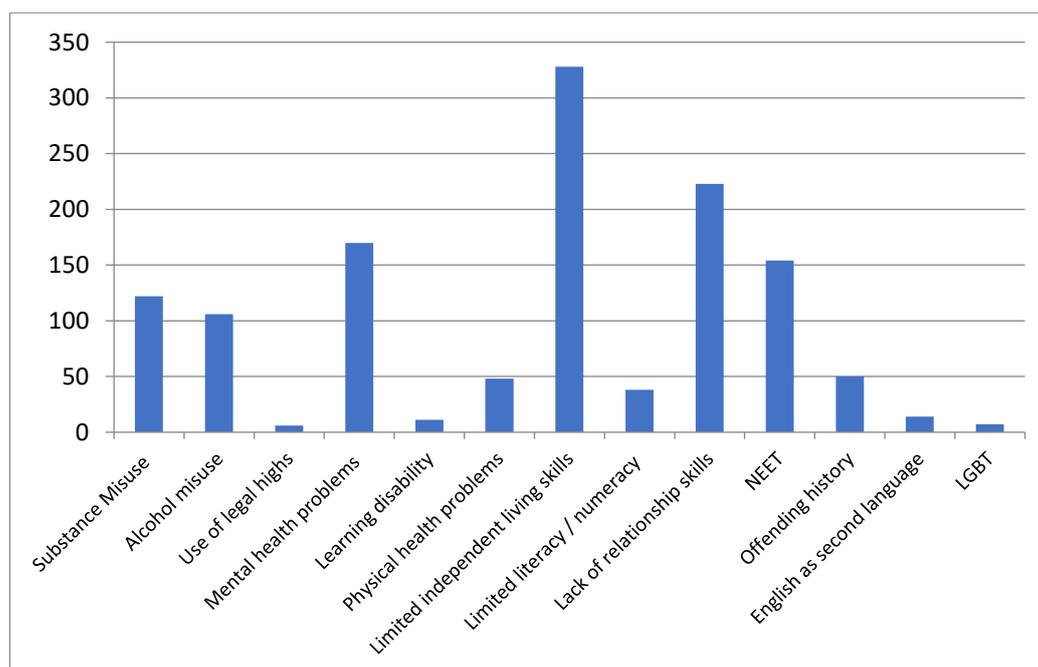
The number of young people who were rough sleeping immediately prior to accessing support in February 2018 is unknown. But reflecting the survey findings over recent years (see Irving, 2016, 2017), providers reported that experiences of rough sleeping are relatively infrequent and have been for some time. This suggests that the region is faring better than the national picture where almost half of providers engaged with in Homeless Link’s (2018) ‘Young and Homeless’ research reported an increase in experiences of rough sleeping among their young clients. This is likely to be explained by the significantly smaller scale of youth homelessness, the relatively good levels of housing and support provision and more favourable housing costs in the region, compared to London and many other cities outside of London.

Young People’s Support Needs

Providers were asked about the number of young people accessing their services in February 2018 that had different types of support need. The same question was asked of local authorities, with reference to those young people who approached them as homeless. There is a danger of double counting, but the findings nonetheless give an indication of the most common needs of young people, in addition to housing needs.

Strongly reflecting the national picture (Homeless Link, 2018), the most common support needs identified by both sets of respondents were: lack of independent living skills; lack of relationship skills; not being in education, training or employment (NEET); and, mental health problems. Thus, poor mental health remains a significant issue among young people, alongside those which traditionally appear as widespread. Positively, problems of substance misuse and the use of legal highs have steadily appeared as less widespread than in recent years, following peaks in 2014 and 2015, when parts of the region were hotspots for the use of novel psychoactive drugs (NPS) by young people (Irving, 2014; Harding et al, 2015; Irving et al, 2015).

Figure 2: The Support Needs of Homeless Young People in February 2018



Following successive surveys which have identified mental health problems among homeless young people as increasingly prevalent in the region and thus raised concern, it was decided that this year's survey would ask a series of questions about mental health specifically. In February 2018, providers agreed that reflecting the previous survey findings, mental health issues among the young people that they support had become more prevalent. In the snapshot month alone, roughly 100 clients (almost one third of the young clients being supported by the eleven providers who responded to the survey) were said to have been formally diagnosed as having mental health problems. These were attributed to limited social networks among the affected young people, the pressures on young people created by social media, limited opportunities for meaningful employment, drug and alcohol use and the limited availability of early intervention support for young people. The link between these factors and mental health are well-established within the literature (Shelter, 2007; Sanders and Brown, 2015; Laing, 2017; Berryman, 2017). Nationally too, homelessness service providers reported that 35% of the young people accessing their services experienced mental health problems (Homeless Link, 2018).

Of further concern, providers reported that very few of their young clients were engaging with any form of service (either specialist or generalist) likely to address their mental health problems. Here, respondents highlighted the significant difficulties young people face in accessing mental health services, as manifested in long waiting lists and/or slow referral processes, and a scarcity of specialised services in certain areas. As a result, young people's problems were reported to worsen or intensify over time. In addition, providers themselves also reported experiences of being unable to assist young people at times due to their levels of need and the risks which they posed to others were cited. Some also attributed this to capacity issues and some clients lacking a local area connection.

Furthermore, of nine providers who answered the question, four (44%) felt that the number of young people accessing their project with complex needs had increased since February 2017 and five (56%) felt they had stayed the same. None felt that the number of young people accessing their service with complex needs had decreased. Positively, however, none felt that the complexity of young people's needs had increased further. The complexity of young people's needs has been reported as increasing throughout successive surveys, however (Irving, 2016, 2017). Thus, a position of stability will be from an already high level of complexity.

Support Services for Young People

Providers were asked about the range of support services that they provided. Feedback from the nine providers who answered the question is shown in the table below.

Table 2: Support Services Available to Young Clients in February 2018

Support Service	Number of Providers
Advice and information	9
Help accessing benefits	9
Help finding independent accommodation	9
Housing-related support	9
Employment/education support	9
Signposting to other agencies	9
Emergency or short stay accommodation	7
Non short-stay or other accommodation	6
Health support	5
Mediation services	3

Important to note is the availability of in-house practical support relating to accommodation, benefits and employment, but the limited availability of mediation services in comparison. This is despite the centrality of relationship breakdown, tension within households and limited social networks to pathways in and out of youth homelessness (Johnson et al, 2008). Having said this, other research has suggested that some local authorities and providers do not consider mediation to be a specific service, but to be the remit of all housing officers and support workers (Centrepont, 2018), which is positive.

Positively, 6 of 7 providers (86%) said the services which they provided internally had increased or remain unchanged compared to February 2017. Just one (14%) said their service provision had decreased. However, the number and range of services which providers can refer clients onto seems to be ever-decreasing in the region over time. Four providers (50%) reported a further decrease in the availability of external services which they were able to refer clients onto and youth services more generally in their area between February 2017 and 2018.

The qualitative comments provided overwhelmingly spoke of current gaps in appropriate support services for young people with complex needs and a concern that where appropriate bespoke accommodation and support services are not available, this can quickly result in the escalation of young people's needs and behaviours. One of many comments to this effect was:

'A challenge to young people is identifying suitable accommodation for young people who are considered higher risk, so they can receive the right level of support in the right environment. Often these young people cannot be placed with other young people's accommodation and support services and are offered accommodation with mixed clients – this can result in an escalation of behaviours. Whilst there are bespoke providers that can be accessed, these can be expensive and there is limited funding available'.

This is a recurring theme within the survey each year.

Local Authority Prevention Activities

Eight local authorities reported on the level of prevention and relief activities undertaken with young people in February 2018.

The definition of prevention used was ‘when someone avoids homelessness and is assisted to obtain alternative accommodation or remain in their existing home’. A total of 93 positive actions to prevent youth homelessness were reported during this month.

The definition of relief used was ‘when youth homelessness cannot be prevented but the young person is supported to secure accommodation even though the local authority is under no obligation to do this’. A total of 12 cases of successful homelessness relief were recorded during this month.

Considering the changing nature of prevention and relief activity over time, the data suggests an increase in the amount of prevention activity being undertaken by local authorities (see Irving, 2016, 2017). This finding seems to support the assertions of respondents made at the outset of the survey that a decrease in the number of young people accepted as homeless in some parts of the region in February 2018 could be explained, in part, by successful prevention activity. It may also be that prevention and relief activity in the region is higher than that reported above, for several local authority respondents commented that they do not record the age of individuals supported through prevention and relief activity, so were unable to comment on this aspect of the service specifically.

Local authority respondents were asked what they considered to be the most effective prevention activities in operation in their areas in February 2018. As indicated in the table below, family mediation, conciliation including home visits for family/friend threatened exclusions and crisis interventions providing emergency support were most frequently cited as being most effective.

Table 3: Local Authority Views on the Most Effective Prevention Activities in their Area

Activity Type	Frequency
Family mediation	5
Crisis intervention providing emergency support	5
Conciliation including home visits for family/friend threatened exclusions	4
Resolving Housing Benefit problems	3
Resolving rent or service charge arrears in the social or private rented sector	3
Negotiation or legal advocacy to ensure that someone can remain in accommodation in the private rented sector	2
Financial payments from a homeless prevention fund	1
Sanctuary scheme measures for domestic violence	1
Children's Services Use of Section 17 for short term financial support for a 16/17 year old	1
Partnership working with the local Troubled Families programme	1
Education work in schools or other youth provision	0

As per previous years of the survey, reports of interventions being less effective may be because they are no longer key activities in operation in some areas of the region. Indeed, in previous surveys, the scaling back of partnership working with local Troubled Families programmes and education work in schools or other youth provision has been noted (see Irving, 2013, 2014). Several respondents, however, highlighted the value of this past work and the need for more early intervention activity with young people during childhood and adolescence. They argued that problems often remain unaddressed at an early stage and thus become more complex by the time young people present at homelessness services. They also pointed to the need for young people to understand the reality of homelessness.

A third of local authorities (33%) judged that they did not have an adequate range of prevention services available in their area to meet the needs of young people at risk of homelessness in February 2018. This represents a small increase from previous years (Irving, 2017). Indeed, several respondents commented on the ending of some commissioned services in their area as a key factor impacting upon homelessness prevention efforts. They also, however, drew attention to the impact of limited affordable housing options for young people on prevention efforts and the centrality of partnership working and the payment of rent deposits for young people through homelessness prevention funding to overcome this challenge as far as possible. It was clear, however, that more resources for prevention-focused activity are needed and would be beneficial.

All local authorities who engaged with the survey have a protocol in place between Housing and Children's Services for the joint assessment of 16 and 17 year olds. The protocol was judged to be 'very effective' in four cases (44%) and 'effective' in four cases (44%). It was judged to be 'ineffective' in just one case (12%). Effective here was classed as meeting the requirements clarified by *G v Southwark* in 2009. In the qualitative data provided, respondents typically commented on Housing and Children's services working 'hand in hand', holding joint meetings and making joint decisions about individual cases. In some cases, staffing posts were jointly funded also. Some of the more detailed qualitative comments provided here included:

'Joint working with other agencies, as well as having a Joint Protocol Co-ordinator to support the young person through the process and explore all possible options greatly assists in the prevention of homelessness'

'All 16/17 year olds who cannot remain with their parents or family and must enter an assessment centre, have a needs assessment and this is shared at a panel, with multiagency decisions made about the most appropriate placement for them. This decision is made in conjunction with the wishes of the young person where ever possible'

Several local authorities, however, also pointed out that working arrangements are being reviewed.

Finally, two thirds of local authorities (6 of 9) said they have a youth homelessness strategy, which is outlined within their overall homelessness strategy. But the remainder did not report having any form of youth homelessness strategy in their area. The merits of this could be explored further.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2018

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into force in April 2018. The aim of the Act is to focus local authority responses to homelessness on 'prevention' and create a statutory right to support for every person experiencing or at risk of homelessness, regardless of their priority need status (Centrepoin, 2018). Specifically, the HRA places the following duties on local authorities:

- To provide free information and advice which must meet the specific needs of people in the area, including vulnerable groups such as care leavers.
- To take reasonable steps to help prevent any eligible person who is at risk of homelessness from becoming homeless, up to 56 days before they are likely to become homeless.
- To relieve homelessness by helping an applicant to secure accommodation for at least six months.

The HRA also places a duty on a range of public authorities to notify a local housing authority of those who they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, commonly known as the 'duty to refer'.

Implementation of the Act is well underway in local authorities across the region and in working towards this, key measures have included: the development of homelessness reduction strategies, fundamental reviews of all working practices, the implementation of new IT systems, the reconfiguration of teams and appointment of new staff, staff training on the requirements of the HRA and the development of stronger partnership arrangements. Most survey respondents welcomed the principles of the HRA and specifically, the focus on prevention which the legislation encourages and the removal of the priority need criteria for prevention and relief support. However, there was variation in the extent to which respondents believed the Act will have a tangible impact on provision in their areas.

On the one hand, those local authorities that currently focus on prevention felt the impact of the legislation is likely to be minimal. Here, several reported that they were already working in line with the Act even prior to implementation. As such, the Act does not represent a fundamental shift in working practices.

On the other hand, others reported that where a young person may once have been unlikely to receive constructive housing advice and support, they are now being assessed, with a personalised housing plan being subsequently co-produced and greater effort being placed on identifying appropriate housing options and solutions for them. Here, one local authority respondent commented:

'The removal of priority need means that a wider pool of individuals are now being given support and worked with, rather than signposted to other agencies'.

Others still reported that in their areas, the Act may be undermining the ability of housing offices to support young people due to the greater number of individuals which officers are now supporting (resulting in longer waiting times for assistance) and the increased administrative burden which complying with the legislation has placed on them. Here, one local authority respondent commented:

'The new rules are more resource-intensive than prior working practices and this is reducing the amount of time which workers are able to spend with those presenting'.

More broadly, respondents were clear that whatever improvements come about as a result of the HRA, its introduction alone will not be a panacea for ending youth homelessness. Several key factors beyond the scope of the legislation are likely to hinder its implementation. For example, the duty to prevent homelessness is likely to be hindered by the sudden nature of a homelessness episode or the complexity of a young person's need and those of their family which require intervention for longer than 56 days. In addition, when a young person needs to leave the family home, having emergency accommodation available is essential, but not always possible. Furthermore, the duty to relieve homelessness relies upon the availability of suitable accommodation which meets the needs of a young person and includes the provision of support where needed. But, throughout the lifespan of this survey, the provision of supported accommodation in many areas has been under threat or insufficient. Indeed, both limited supplies of supported accommodation and problems with the suitability of large supported accommodation units for young people were reported in some areas. Here, one respondent commented:

'There are limited supported accommodation options for 16-25 year old's. [Name of supported accommodation] is the default option, but it is not suitable for all'.

Another provided an almost identical comment:

'We rely on [name of supported accommodation] as the main source of supported accommodation for young people. However, this isn't suitable for all'.

Highlighting the need for caution about the limitations of the Act, a typical comment here was:

'Its new legislation but with the same basic premise and no additional resource to implement fully the real change of providing suitable and affordable accommodation for everyone who needs it'.

Temporary Accommodation

Emergency accommodation plays a key role in preventing young people from sleeping rough or staying in unsafe temporary living arrangements. Local authority respondents were thus asked whether the supply of a range of forms of emergency accommodation (crash pad beds, youth specific assessment centres/short-stay accommodation, all agency emergency hostels, No Second Night Out provision, supported lodgings, bed and breakfast hotels and other short stay accommodation) had changed in the 12 months leading up to February 2018. Across the board, respondents typically reported levels of 'No Second Night Out' provision to be unchanged. However, in the case of crash pad beds, youth specific assessment centre/short-stay supported accommodation, all age emergency hostels and supported lodgings provision, one third of respondents reported an increase in provision, while the remainder typically reported no change. This is highly positive, demonstrating the determination of most local authorities to continue to invest in homelessness services and is particularly important following the introduction of the HRA. Several respondents even

reported that youth homelessness had been a greater focus in the re-commissioning of services since the previous survey was carried out.

Considering the use of Bed and Breakfasts (B&Bs) to accommodate homeless young people, levels of usage continue to be low in the region. Of nine local authority respondents, two (22%) said that they *never* used B&Bs to accommodate young people, five (56%) said they *rarely* used it and two (22%) *occasionally* use it. These estimates are broadly in line with national figures (Homeless Link, 2018).

Regarding short-term accommodation options, most local authority respondents said that there had been no change in the provision of hostels/foyers, supported lodgings, shared housing for those in education, training or employment and other non-short-stay accommodation. However, one third of local authority respondents (3 of 9) reported increases in the provision of self-contained units with low or no support and two reported increased supported lodgings provision.

The perceptions of providers reflected the above, with most agreeing that the provision of emergency accommodation remained unchanged since the previous survey.

More broadly, across the lifespan of the survey, consistently positive findings have been reported in this area.

Moving-On from Youth Homelessness

Local authorities and providers were asked to rank the most common destinations that young people moved on to after accessing their services. Contrary to the national picture where a return to family and friends was identified by local authorities and providers as the most common move-on destination of those engaged with (Homeless Link, 2018), regional respondents ranked the most common move-on destinations as being local authority owned housing, followed by private rented sector properties.

Linked to this, it is perhaps not surprising that supporting young people to access rent deposits and developing relationships with private landlords willing to consider young people as tenants were the most common forms of move-on support being undertaken and offered by local authorities and providers in the region.

It is also interesting to note that returning to the family home did not feature heavily in the respondents' discussions of move-on. This stands in contrast to the early years of the survey, where this was a common move-on destination for young clients. This finding is perhaps in keeping with the assertion that problems of stress and tension within households are more acute than in previous years and the complexity of many young people's needs is often high. The last element of the Positive Pathway Model – which was only confirmed as being used in three local authority areas in the region through the survey – covers the provision of various safe, decent and affordable move-on housing options, which are considered critical in helping young people to successfully move away from homelessness. Building upon this, local authority respondents were asked about their level of confidence with regards to different features of the accommodation that young people move on to in their area. The results are shown below. In all but one case, all respondents were confident in the quality or features of move-on accommodation for young people. As demonstrated by the table below,

respondents were most confident about the provision of housing with adequate facilities, security and locks on doors.

Table 4: Local Authority Confidence in the Quality of Move-On Accommodation

Aspect of accommodation	Highly confident	Very confident	Confident	Unconfident	Don't know
Housing with adequate facilities, security and locks on doors	5		3		1
Secure permanent accommodation they can call their own rather than moving between temporary accommodation	2		7		
Housing in an area they know, feel safe, where they are aware of available facilities and services, where to go for help, what the transport links are and close to training and employment	3		5		1
Where they want it, housing in an area close to family, carers, friends and other support networks	3		3	1	2

Inevitably, the size, rurality and levels of provision across different areas played a role in the confidence of respondents, particularly in respect of the proximity of housing to close family, carers, friends and other support networks.

The following quote demonstrates the efforts which are invested in securing the most appropriate and sustainable move-on housing option for young people in one local authority area:

'Our supported accommodation providers are all located in central [name of local authority area], close to transport links, colleges etc. We will also respect a young person's wishes and feelings (this is always built into their Pathway Plan) and we will try and help them secure accommodation in an area that they wish to be in. We also support care leavers in private rented properties in areas that they wish to be in and can access Discretionary Housing Payment's if needed. We also try and limit the moves between temporary accommodation, where possible. We do this by working with providers, landlords, young people and other agencies to sustain accommodation arrangements and put preventative measures in place to avoid a placement breaking down'.

Having said this, despite the best efforts of respondents, securing decent and affordable accommodation was reported to be one of the most significant challenges which they faced, with the affordability of housing continuing to be undermined by welfare reform. Respondents

explained that a number of administrative arrangements, as well as reductions in entitlements, were continuing to affect the preventative agenda, drivers of homelessness and hinder people's ability to move out of homelessness. The ongoing roll-out of Universal Credit – with its widely-reported delays to payments for new claimants – was cited as particularly problematic in terms of young people's ability to access and sustain accommodation in this year's survey. At the national level too, delayed payments under Universal Credit were one area of particular concern, with 92% of the local authorities and homelessness providers who responded to Homeless Link's 'Young and Homeless' research (Homeless Link, 2018) stating that they were impacting on young people's ability to access and sustain accommodation in their area.

Furthermore, regulations introduced from April 2017 removed the automatic entitlement to the housing cost element of Universal Credit for unemployed 18-21 year olds, unless they could show that they met an exemption. This policy was in effect while this research was being conducted. Several providers highlighted the negative impact of this for some young people, commenting;

'Although we do offer assistance for people to access their own accommodation, there is no Housing Benefit currently payable for those under 21, therefore excluding them from gaining their own tenancy unless in exceptional circumstances. They would only qualify for supported accommodation. Whilst we do have supported housing and providers within [the area], there is increasing pressures on these agencies due to the amount of people presenting'.

Fortunately, in March 2018, the Government announced that these regulations would be amended, so that all 18-21 year olds would be entitled to housing costs within Universal Credit once again.

Perceptions of limited, meaningful employment opportunities in the North East were also said to be impacting on young people's housing options. Indeed, recent statistics indicate that unemployment rates for 16-24 year olds currently stand at approximately 12% (House of Commons, 2018). Although this has fallen in recent years, these figures remain higher than the unemployment rate for other working age people. In addition, young people can often be employed in jobs that are low paid, insecure and present few opportunities for career development (D'Arcy, 2017).

Conclusion

Although the actual scale of youth homelessness is difficult to quantify, the situation does not appear to have significantly improved since the last survey, with various local authorities and providers reporting high levels of ongoing demand for support, severe problems of mental health among clients and high levels of complex needs.

Although operating within a challenging environment of funding cuts and high levels of demand, the study shows that local authorities and service providers still offer a range of services and options to meet the diverse needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. However, efforts to tackle youth homelessness are taking place within a social and economic context in which young people's opportunities are increasingly constrained. There was a clear sense throughout this survey that funding cuts for homelessness and related services, the continuing roll-out of welfare reforms, the nature of the housing market and limited, meaningful employment opportunities for young people are all impacting on the prevention and management of youth homelessness, as well as young people's ability to access and sustain independent accommodation. With Universal Credit still being rolled out nationally, there is a need for a thorough examination of any specific exclusionary effects on both the wellbeing and outcomes of young people, and on national and local policies aiming to tackle youth homelessness.

The most significant change to the homelessness agenda in recent years has been the introduction of the HRA. This has a key role to play in improving the provision of information, advice and support for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The focus of the HRA on prevention, support for all, personalisation and co-production are welcomed. But, as with much legislation, its principles collide with those of other social and economic priorities and policy agendas. Without increased resource in this area, the actual impacts of the Act may fall significantly short of its desired outcomes. Specifically, the success of local authorities and homelessness service providers in preventing youth homelessness and ensuring quick solutions when it does occur, depends on the availability of a range of housing options for young people – including appropriate supported and PRS accommodation. But, as highlighted by the survey, young people experience significant difficulties when trying to access appropriate and affordable housing.

Continuing with the theme of prevention a key finding of this survey is the renewed centrality of family breakdown as the dominant cause of youth homelessness. All agencies thus must be alert to the factors which might push a family towards breaking point. Mediation, or conciliation, is not sufficient to tackle the underlying problems that are faced by many of these families and a more comprehensive approach will be needed. It is absolutely essential that agencies work together locally to achieve this, with partnership working being frequently cited throughout the survey as integral to the achievement of positive outcomes for young people in a challenging context. Many local authorities and providers are already working well with agencies in their areas. However, there is clear scope for closer working between the homelessness and health sectors, as well as with employment services. It is crucial that effective working relationships are in place across those agencies, as well as in agencies not currently subject to the duty to refer including the police, GPs and further education institutions.

Overall, there is much to be positive about now that the Homelessness Reduction Act has come into force. Many local authorities are rising to the new challenge and are innovating in order to provide the best possible service to young people in their area. However, it remains to be seen whether external factors including the housing market and the welfare system will prove to be an insurmountable challenge to youth homelessness in our region and beyond.

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Youth Homeless North East
1st Floor Mea House
Ellison Place
Newcastle
NE1 8XS

0191 2551911
info@yhne.org.uk
www.yhne.org.uk

 @YouthHomelessNE
 YouthHomelessNorthEast

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