Youth Homelessness in the North East: Survey Findings

September 2014
Acknowledgements

Once again, we would like to thank the Northern Rock Foundation and The Millfield House Foundation for their continued support in making this third annual survey possible. We would also like again to acknowledge and thank Homeless Link’s Policy Team for allowing us to use their online survey tool and for their support in administering the responses.

Thanks also to Adele Irving, Research Fellow with the Centre for Public Policy, in the Department of Social Sciences and Languages at Northumbria University, whose role in collating and analysing the data received, and compiling the final report, is very much appreciated.

Finally, a huge thank you goes to all our colleagues and partners from each of the North East local authorities, the voluntary and community sector and wider partners for taking the time to complete the survey. We hope the regional picture the survey provides will be a useful tool to inform the further development of strategy and services.

Foreword

The findings of this third annual report commissioned by YHNE suggest that the number of young people presenting themselves as homeless continues to increase in the North East. On average in February this year each of our 12 local authorities was approached by a young person presenting as homeless every day and almost twice that number approached them seeking help. During February over 400 young people were been assisted with supported accommodation in the region.

The most common reason for young people becoming homeless was as a result of family breakdown. Those seeking assistance were in the main helped by councils and others to find temporary and supported accommodation.

The results of the survey are generally positive with regard to outcomes for individuals but are indicative of an increasing problem in the region. Whilst most who present at local authorities receive positive help with regard to their homelessness their life chances are inevitably restricted by the complexity of their situation and the problems they suffer from.

One of the major problems trapping homeless young people into the benefits system is the lack of training and employment opportunities that exist for them. Many councils, housing associations and others are promoting and providing schemes to help create employment opportunities but this work needs to be built on and YHNE will be promoting through a regional charter an increase in provision over the coming 12 months.

Mike Clarke,
YHNE Chair, Thirteen Group Chair
Executive Summary

Research Aims and Methodology

In March 2014, Youth Homeless North East (YHNE) conducted its third annual survey into youth homelessness in the North East. The research aims to establish the nature, extent and primary causes of youth homelessness in the North East, to compare the regional picture to that at the national level and to identify how the wider social, political and economic context is impacting on the experiences of young people, as well as levels the nature of service provision over time. It is hoped that the findings will be useful for informing local policy and practice.

In total, eleven responses were received from eight local authorities in the region and nine responses were received from housing associations and homelessness agencies.

Research Findings

- The data suggests that youth homelessness in the North East is increasing over time. In February 2014, between 246 and 275 young people presented as homeless to local authorities. This equates to an average of between 31 and 34 presentations per local authority and is an increase on the previous year’s average of between 18 and 23 presentations (YHNE, 2013). In addition, between 417 and 481 young people sought housing advice and information. This equates to an average of between 52 and 60 requests per local authority and is an increase on the previous year’s figure of between 26 and 50 requests (YHNE, 2013). Nine homelessness agencies and housing associations were supporting a total of 422 young people in February 2014. This equates to an average of 47 young people per provider and compares to an average of 35 per provider in 2013 (YHNE, 2013).

- In February 2014, 67% of young people being supported by local authorities, homelessness agencies and housing associations were aged 20-24, with the average age of young homeless people in the North East being 20-21 years old. This reflects findings at the national level (Homeless Link, 2014).

- Positively, of 255 cases, 87% of young people who presented as homeless to local authorities were assessed either immediately or within the same day; although, 12% were assessed within 1 to 3 days and 2% were assessed within 4 to 7 days.

- The primary cause of youth homelessness in February 2014 – as reported by seven (88%) local authorities, two (66%) homelessness agencies and three (50%) housing associations – was parents no longer being willing to accommodate young people. This was linked to changes to the benefits system, violence/abuse, overcrowding and general financial difficulties. These causes of homelessness appear more prevalent in this year’s research, compared to previous years (YHNE, 2012, 2013).

- In February 2014, 79 homeless young people in the region were care leavers, 53 had a history of offending and between 19 and 24 had experienced rough sleeping immediately prior to accessing support. Four (50%) local authorities and three (50%) housing associations reported that rough
sleeping among young people had increased since February 2013. Homelessness agencies reported levels to be unchanged over time.

- Respondents were almost unanimous that limited independent living skills was the most acute support need of young clients in February 2014. Other prevalent needs included: not being in education, training or employment; substance misuse; a lack of relationship skills; and, mental health problems. Local authorities reported that of 133 young homeless people engaged with in February 2014 where their employment status was known, 95% were known to be unemployed.

- Eight (45%) respondents reported that the needs of young people had become more complex in the 12 months leading up to February 2014. Housing associations were most likely to report this.

- Six (75%) local authorities reported adequate levels of prevention support in their areas to meet young people’s needs in February 2014. Mediation services and joint protocols were reported to the most effective approaches to homelessness prevention.

- The most common outcomes of local authority prevention efforts in February 2014 were young people moving into long-stay temporary accommodation, followed by entering a new social tenancy. Less young people returned to the family home following prevention efforts than in February 2013 (YHNE, 2013).

- All homelessness agencies and three (60%) housing associations were in agreement that there is insufficient service provision for young people with complex needs. Emergency and supported accommodations were cited as the main service gaps for this client group.

- Seven (87.5%) local authorities reported that their local housing allocation strategies take into account the needs of young homeless people. Just one (14%) has a youth homelessness strategy.

- Homelessness agencies and housing associations were in agreement that the three most significant welfare reform changes impacting on young people are: the ‘bedroom tax’, benefit sanctions and the introduction of Universal Credit.

- Recent changes to housing benefit were reported to be affecting young people’s ability to access and sustain housing, either directly through reductions in housing benefit, or indirectly through the changing attitudes of private landlords towards young/homeless tenants. Other impacts include general financial hardship, food poverty, increased stress/anxiety, increased mental health problems and less confidence to move on.

- It was generally reported that young people have a limited understanding of welfare reform.

- Best practice responses to welfare reform cited were strategic planning and partnership working, the appointment and bolstering of welfare rights and financial inclusion officers/teams within services, the production of accessible information resources on welfare reform for young clients and having regular one-to-one meetings with clients to discuss their benefits situation.
Introduction

Overview of the Research

This report outlines the findings of the third year of Youth Homeless North East’s (YHNE) annual survey of youth homelessness. The research aims to establish the nature, extent and causes of youth homelessness in the North East, to compare the regional picture to that at the national level and to identify how the wider social, political and economic context is impacting on the experiences of young people, as well as levels the nature of service provision over time. We hope that the findings will be used by local authorities, housing associations and homelessness agencies in the North East to inform strategic and operational priorities.

The key questions explored through the research include:

- How many people young people are falling victim to homelessness in the North East?
- What are the main causes of youth homelessness?
- How many young people falling into homelessness have experienced local authority care, rough sleeping and engagement with the criminal justice system?
- What are the support needs of young people?
- What homelessness prevention activities are in place across the North East and how effective are these?
- What accommodation and support services are available to young homeless people?
- What impacts is welfare reform having on young people?

Methodology

This year’s research was carried out through three online surveys: one tailored to local authorities, one tailored to homelessness agencies and one tailored to housing associations. This third survey is a new addition to the annual study. The surveys largely reflect those used by Homeless Link’s ‘Young and Homeless’ research, which looks at the nature of youth homelessness in England as a whole each year. This is to ensure that the regional and national data collected are comparable.

The surveys consisted of a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions and asked for information relating to single homeless people, aged 16-24. They also referred to two timeframes: February 2014 for snapshot figures and the previous 12 months for the assessment of changes over time.

A total of eleven responses were received from eight local authorities. Where responses within the same local authority to individual questions were the same, the findings are presented in terms of the ‘total number of local authorities’. Where responses to individual questions varied, findings are presented in terms of the ‘total number of local authority respondents’. A total of three responses were received from homelessness agencies, with a further six provided by housing associations. Due to a technical fault, the response rates are lower than those received in previous years.

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 findings.
Research Findings

The Extent of Youth Homelessness

Limited data is available on levels of youth homelessness, as many young people fall outside the definition of statutory homelessness. The main information available relates to the number of young people who are statutorily homeless and receive support from local authorities, and those accessing services in receipt of central government funding for housing-related support (Homeless Link, 2014).

All local authority respondents provided data on the number of young people aged 16-24 who presented as homeless in February 2014. The data provided by respondents within the same local authority conflicted in a number of cases. Taking the lowest and highest estimates given, the data indicates that between 246 and 275 young people presented as homeless. This equates to an average of between 31 and 34 presentations per local authority and is an increase on the previous year’s average which stood at of between 18 and 23 (YHNE, 2013).

Respondents also provided data on the number of young people who sought housing advice and support in February 2014. Again, some local authority respondents provided conflicting data. Taking the lowest and highest estimates given, the data indicates that local authorities received between 417 and 481 requests for advice and information. This equates to an average number of between 52 and 60 requests per local authority; again, this is an increase on the previous year’s figures of between 26 and 50 requests (YHNE, 2013).

Collectively, the data indicates that between 663 and 756 young people presented as homeless or in need of housing advice and support in February 2014. This is at the upper end of the 2013 estimate of between 467 and 753 young people (based on data from all 12 local authorities in the North East) (YHNE, 2013) and is higher than the 2012 estimate of 533 young people (based on data from ten local authorities) (YHNE, 2012). This suggests that youth homelessness in the region is increasing over time.

The quantitative findings reflect the perceptions of respondents, whereby five of ten (50%) reported increases in the number of young people presenting as homeless over the past twelve months. Three (30%) reported that the number had decreased and two (20%) reported no change. Similarly, five of nine (56%) reported an increase in the number of young people seeking housing advice and support over time, while three (33%) reported a decrease and one (11%) said they did not know.

Based on nine responses, homelessness agencies and housing associations reported supporting a total of 422 young people in February 2014. This equates to an average of 47 young people per provider, which is comparable to an average of 46 young people per provider in 2013 (YHNE, 2013).
Age Breakdown of Young Homeless People

The surveys revealed that, of 883 (highest estimate) young homeless people being supported by local authorities, homelessness agencies and housing associations in February 2014 (where the age of young people was given), 0 (0%) were under the age of 16, 118 (16%) were aged 16-17, 208 (27%) were aged 18-19, 211 (28%) were aged 20-21 and 220 (29%) were aged 22-24. This indicates that in February 2014, the majority of homeless young people in the North East were at the upper end of the 16-24 age bracket, with the average age being 20-21 years old. This reflects findings at the national level (Homeless Link, 2014). It suggests that the age of homeless young people in the region is increasing. In February 2013, the North East had a slightly higher proportion of young people at the lower half of the 16-24 age bracket, at 57% (YHNE, 2013).

Figure 1: Age Breakdown of 883 Homeless Young Clients in the North East (%)

As identified in previous years at the regional and national level (YHNE, 2013; Homeless Link, 2013, 2014), young people aged 20+ are most likely to have presented to local authorities, or to be supported by housing associations. Those aged 16-19 are most likely to be engaging with homelessness agencies. This pattern is likely to reflect that those approaching local authorities at a young age are typically offered support by Children’s Services departments rather than Housing (Homeless Link, 2014).

Local authority respondents were mixed in their perceptions about how the numbers of young people presenting as homeless in each of the age categories had changed since February 2013. All respondents reported no change in the number of young people presenting aged under 16. Five of eleven (45.5%) reported an increase in young people aged 16-17 years, while five (45.5%) reported a decrease and one (9%) reported no change. Seven of eleven (64%) reported an increase in 18-19 year olds, while three (27%) reported no change and one (9%) reported a decrease. Five of eleven (45.5%) reported an increase in 20-21 year olds, while three (27%) reported a decrease, two (18%) reported no change and one (9%) said they didn’t know. Among 22-24 year olds, four of eleven (36%) reported an increase, four (36%) reported a decrease, two (18%) reported no change and one (9%) said they didn’t know.
Figure 2: Changes to the Age Breakdown of Young People presenting to Local Authorities

The perceptions of housing associations were similarly mixed. All six respondents reported no change in the number of under 16s being supported. Two (67%) reported increases in the number of 16-17 years olds being supported, while one (33%) reported no change. Three (50%) reported no change in the number of 18-19 and 20-21 year olds being supported, two (33%) reported a decrease and one (17%) reported an increase. Regarding 22-24 year olds, three (50%) reported an increase and three (50%) reported no change.

Figure 3: Changes to the Age Breakdown of Young People presenting to Housing Associations

All three homelessness agencies were in agreement that there had been no change in the number of under 16s being supported and that there had been an increase in the number of 20-21 and 22-24 year olds being supported. However, two (67%) reported decreases in the number of 16-17 year olds being supported, while one (33%) reported no change and two (67%) reported increases in the number of 18-19 year olds being supported, while one (33%) reported a decrease.

Figure 4: Changes to the Age Breakdown of Young People presenting to Homelessness Agencies
Assessment Waiting Times

All eight local authorities provided data on how long young people who presented as homeless in February 2014 had to wait to be assessed. Taking the highest estimates given, of 255 cases, 111 (44%) young people were assessed immediately, 109 (43%) were assessed on the same day, 30 (12%) were assessed within 1 to 3 days, and 5 (2%) were assessed within 4 to 7 days. The reasons for delays are unknown.

The Causes of Homelessness

Youth homelessness can be the result of the complex interplay of a range of individual and structural factors. The primary cause of youth homelessness in February 2014 – as reported by seven of eight (88%) local authorities, two of three (66%) homelessness agencies and three of six (50%) housing associations – was parents no longer being willing to accommodate young people.
While the above figure refers to the primary causes of homelessness, parents no longer willing to accommodate them was a secondary cause of homelessness for a much higher number of young people. The table below indicates that the most common reasons for this were changes to the benefits system (particularly changes to non-dependent deductions), violence/abuse, overcrowding and financial difficulties, although irreversible relationship breakdown with parents and step-parents were also common factors.

Table 1: Reasons why parents were no longer willing to accommodate young people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of Homelessness</th>
<th>Local Authorities</th>
<th>Housing Associations</th>
<th>Homelessness Agencies</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes to Non-Dependent Deductions</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/Abuse</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcrowding</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Difficulties</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irretrievable relationship breakdown (step-parent)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irretrievable relationship breakdown (parent)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

parents no longer being willing to accommodate them had increased, eight of 15 (47%) reported that youth homelessness as a result of financial problems caused by benefits reduction had increased\(^1\), six of 16 (38%) reported that youth homelessness as a result of overcrowding and the ending of a tenancy had increased and three of eight (37.5%) reported that the number of young people becoming homeless as a result of leaving local authority care had increased. However, neither local authorities, homelessness agencies nor housing associations, reported significant decreases in any causes of homelessness.

\(^1\) Youth homelessness as a result of benefit changes had also increased significantly between February 2012 and 2013.
Furthermore, more than half of respondents reported that all other causes of youth homelessness had not changed.

**The Experiences of Young Homeless People**

While anyone can fall into homelessness, some groups of young people are more likely to experience homelessness than others.

Housing associations reported that 36 (19%) of the young people being supported in February 2014 had an offending history. For local authorities, the figure was 11 (4%) (highest estimate) and for homelessness agencies, the figure was just six (3%). While the local authority figure is comparable to that found at the national level, the figure for homelessness agencies is significantly lower than the 20% figure found at the national level (Homeless Link, 2014). This indicates that a much smaller proportion of young people being supported by homeless agencies in the North East have an offending background.

Leaving care can be a difficult transition and young people undergoing this process can be at risk of becoming homeless. Homelessness agencies reported that 35 of the young clients being supported in February 2014 were care leavers. This equates to 15% of their young client base and is lower than the national figure of 19% (Homeless Link, 2014). The figure was 27 (14%) for housing associations and 17 (6%) for local authorities. This is also lower than the national figure for local authorities, which stands at 4% (Homeless Link, 2014).

Local authorities and housing associations reported that none of the young people they engaged with in February 2014 were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). The figure for homelessness agencies was three (1%). Figures were similarly low across England, except in parts of London and the South East where figures from homelessness agencies could be as high as 20% (Homeless Link, 2014).

Local authorities and homelessness agencies reported that none of the young people they engaged with in February 2014 had refugee status. The figure was one (0.5%) for housing associations.

**Rough Sleeping among Young Homeless People**

Seven of eight (88%) local authorities reported recording whether a young person presenting as homeless has experienced rough sleeping. Between six and 11 young people (representing 4% of young people, based on highest estimates) were recorded as having slept rough prior to presenting to them in February 2014. This suggests much lower levels of rough sleeping among young people in the North East compared to that which takes place across England as a whole, with the latest national figure standing at 11% (Homeless Link, 2014). Of eight respondents, four (50%) reported that rough sleeping among young people had increased since February 2013, while three (37.5%) reported no change and one (12.5%) did not know.

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2 In February 2013, just 9% of young people being supported by homelessness agencies were care leavers (YHNE, 2013). However, due to responses to the survey from a different set and number of providers, it cannot be assumed that the number of care leavers who become homeless has increased over time.
Of 13 cases where it was known how long they had slept rough for during their last period of rough sleeping, nine (70%) had slept rough for 1 to 2 nights, three (23%) had slept rough for between 3 to 7 nights and one (7%) had slept rough for more than 7 nights. Five young people who presented as homeless in February 2014 were known to have been homeless previously.

Of three homelessness agencies, no young people were reported to have slept rough immediately prior to accessing the service in February 2014 or at any point in time. Furthermore, similar to YHNE (2013), levels of rough sleeping among young people were reported to be unchanged over time. Again, the picture for the North East compares favourably to the national picture, where 12% of young people being supported by homelessness agencies were reported to have been rough sleeping immediately prior to accessing support (Homeless Link, 2014).

Housing associations reported that 13 young people had slept rough immediately prior to accessing support in February 2014, while 33 had slept rough at some point in time. Of 18 cases where it was known how long young clients had slept rough for during their last period of rough sleeping, three (17%) had slept rough for 1 to 2 nights, 14 (78%) had slept rough between 3 to 7 nights and one (5%) had slept rough for more than 7 nights. Of six housing associations, three (50%) reported levels of rough sleeping to be unchanged over time and one (17%) reported an increase. Two (33%) did not know.

### The Support Needs of Young Homeless People

The young people accessing homelessness services and support have a range of complex needs. Respondents were almost unanimous that a lack of independent living skills was the most acute support need of young clients in February 2014. This may be due to a disrupted education or difficult childhood experiences that also contributed to them becoming homeless (Homeless Link, 2014). However, the figure below shows the frequency with which different types of support needs were recorded.

Figure 6: The Prevalence of Support Needs among Young Homeless People in February 2014
The data indicates that the most prevalent support needs of young people in February 2014 were: a lack of education, training or employment (258); a lack of independent living skills (199); an offending history (98); substance misuse (72); a lack of relationship skills (63); and, mental health problems (49).

In addition, local authorities reported that of 133 young homeless people engaged with in February 2014, 126 (95%) were known to be unemployed. Homeless Link (2014) identified that around half of young homeless people are not in education, employment or training at the point of becoming homeless nationally. This further highlights the scale of the problem of youth employment in the North East.

Lack of independent living skills, lack of relationship skills and not being in education, employment or training were similarly identified as the most frequently occurring needs of homeless young people 12 months previously (YHNE, 2013).

**Complex Needs**

Eight (45%) of 18 respondents reported that the needs of young people had become more complex in the 12 months leading up to February 2014, four (22%) reported that they had not changed and six (33%) did not know. This building upon the findings of 2013 where 50% of respondents reported that young people’s had become more complex since 2012 (THNE, 2013).

The increasing complexity of support needs of homeless people at the national level was found by Homeless Link’s (2014).

However, breaking the data down into the three stakeholder groups, housing associations were most likely to report that the support needs of young people had become more complex over time, with five of six (83%) respondents giving this response.

Local authorities and homelessness agencies gave more mixed responses. Just two of nine (22%) local authority respondents reported that needs had become more complex, while four (44%) reported that the complexity of needs had not changed and four (44%) said they did not know. Meanwhile, one (33%) homeless agency reported that support needs had become more complex, one (33%) reported that they had not changed and one (33%) said they did not know. This suggests a more positive picture in the North East, compared to that at the national level, where around a quarter of local authorities and two-thirds of homelessness agencies reported that young people’s needs were more complex than last year (Homeless Link, 2014).

**Homelessness Prevention**

*The Availability of Homelessness Prevention Initiatives*

Local authority respondents were asked about the availability of homeless prevention initiatives in their area. Positively, six of eight (75%) local authorities reported adequate levels of prevention support in their areas to meet young people’s needs in February 2014; this was not reported to be the case in two (25%) areas. The national figure here was 30% (Homeless Link, 2014). The availability of a range of prevention
initiatives is outlined in Figure 7.

Figure 7: The Availability of Homeless Prevention Initiatives across the North East

Seven of eight (88%) local authorities reported that Children’s Services and Housing work together to target young people aged under-18 and their families where homelessness is a possibility and that services are available in their area for young people presenting as homeless. Conflicting responses were given in the case of one local authority, respectively.

Six of seven (86%) reported that education work takes place in schools and other youth services and working in partnership with local Troubled Families programmes. Conflicting responses were given in the case of one local authority.

Six of eight (75%) reported that home visiting routinely takes place where appropriate. One local authority reported that this does not take place in their area. Conflicting responses were given in the case of the remaining authority.

Five of six (83%) reported having a mediation service to support prevention work. Conflicting responses were given in the case of one local authority.3

Changes to the Availability of Homelessness Prevention Initiatives

Respondents suggested a mixed picture regarding the availability of local authority homelessness prevention services across the region over time. Of ten local authority respondents, four (40%) reported that the number of services for young people in their area had not changed over the period February 2013 to February 2014, two (20%) reported that they had increased, one (10%) reported that they had decreased and three (10%) said they did not know.

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3 Due to the lower response rate to this year’s survey, it is not possible to assess how the availability of homelessness prevention initiatives has changed over time.
Two positive new developments highlighted by respondents, however, were the introduction of a peer education programme for young people and a consortium arrangement regarding the sharing of physical and financial resources across areas. Mediation services were highlighted as one area where services had been lost.

Reflecting the findings of YHNE (2013), mediation services (along with joint protocols) were reported to the most effective developments in preventing youth homelessness.

A mixed picture was also given regarding the availability of voluntary sector services. Four of ten (40%) local authority respondents reported that the number of voluntary sector services available to young people in their area had not changed since February 2013, two (20%) reported that they had decreased, one (10%) reported an increase and three (30%) said they did not know.

**Joint Working between Children’s Services and Housing Departments**

All eight local authorities reported that there is a protocol in place between Housing and Children’s Services in their local authority for the joint assessment of 16 and 17 year olds. Local authority respondents gave conflicting data about the number of young people assessed under their joint protocol, with the figure ranging between 68 and 82 young people.

Three of ten (30%) respondents reported joint working to be very effective and four (40%) reported it to be effective; this is similar to the national figure where 70% reported joint working to be effective or very effective (Homeless Link, 2014). However, two (20%) reported it to be neither effective nor ineffectible and one (10%) reported it to be ineffective. These findings are less positive than in 2013, where 93% of local authority respondents (13 of 14) reported joint working to be either effective or very effective (YHNE, 2013). Where joint working was said to be ineffective, the protocol and working practices were said to be under review.

**The Outcomes of Homelessness Prevention**

Local authorities provided information on the outcomes of 342 prevention cases (highest estimate) in February 2014.
The data indicates that the most common outcomes of local authority prevention efforts in February 2014 were young people moving into long-stay temporary accommodation, followed by entering a new social tenancy. Almost equal numbers returned to the family home or entered a new private tenancy. The least common outcome of prevention efforts was young people moving in with relations or friends.

These findings contrast to the situation in February 2013, where young people were most likely to return to the family home (34%) and less likely to enter longer stay temporary accommodation (21%) following engagement with prevention services (YHNE, 2013). It is not possible to determine whether this is a positive or concerning shift. Several homeless agencies following the previous survey were keen to highlight that returning to the family home should not always be considered a successful outcome.

**Support Services for Young Homeless People**

Homelessness agencies and housing associations were asked to provide information about the range of support services they offer to young clients. As illustrated by the chart below, most organisations reported providing support around emotional wellbeing, employment, housing-related support and support to find accommodation, as well as more general advice and information. However, support with addictions, mental and physical health and mediation appears to be more lacking.

![Figure 8: Outcomes of 342 Cases of Homelessness Prevention](image)

**Figure 9: The Availability of Support Services within Housing Associations and Homelessness Agencies for Young Clients in February 2014**
Homelessness agencies were evenly split in their opinions about changes to the availability of support services since February 2013. Regarding both services they provide and the availability of external services, one (33%) reported an increase, one (33%) reported a decrease due to funding cuts and one (33%) reported no change.

A mixed picture was also provided by housing associations. Of six responses, two (33%) suggested an increase in the availability of services they provide, two (33%) reported a decrease and two (33%) reported no change. One housing association reported no longer being able to provide general needs floating support due to financial constraints. However, another is building 42 new single-bed flats and another has introduced pre-tenancy support to prospective tenants to identify issues that may arise before the tenancy commences. Regarding external services, three of five (60%) reported decreases; just one (20%) reported an increase and one (20%) reported no change. Here, the loss of a teenage pregnancy service was highlighted, as well as longer waiting times for services.

**Youth Provision**

Just one homelessness agency commented on changes to the availability of youth services in their area since February 2013. They reported that some youth centres in their area have closed down and that limited support and few positive activities for young people to engage in has resulted in increased levels of anti-social behaviour and problems of drugs and alcohol.

Just two housing associations commented on changes to youth provision in their area; of these, one reported the loss of Connexions in their area, while another reported no change.

**Support Services for Young Homeless People with Complex Needs**

Homelessness agencies were in agreement that there is insufficient service provision for those with complex needs; the national figure here was 75% (Homeless Link, 2014). One homelessness agency
suggested that while many services are still available, they are now more limited in terms of the range and intensity of support which they are able to offer clients. These changes may reflect a broader trend across the homelessness sector with results from Homeless Link’s (2013) Survey of Needs and Provision indicating that more homelessness organisations are reducing the level of support they provide, in part because of cuts to funding. The availability of specialist support services for homeless people of all ages has fallen in recent years.

Housing associations had more mixed views. Three of five (60%) agreed with homelessness agencies, while two (40%) reported that existing levels of provision were adequate.

Emergency and supported accommodation was cited as the key service gaps for this client group. Other reported gaps were debt, relationship and sexual health advice services.

**Accommodation Options for Young Homeless People**

**Emergency Accommodation**

Local authorities make use of emergency, temporary accommodation to house young people found to be statutorily homeless and requiring an assessment of their support needs. They also commission homelessness organisations to provide temporary accommodation to both statutorily and non-statutorily homeless young people (Homeless Link, 2012).

The figure below outlines the availability of emergency accommodation options across eight local authority areas. NSNO, Crashpad, Nightstop and Supported Lodgings appear to be widely available across the local authorities in question. Youth specific assessment centres, all-age emergency hostels and other short-stay accommodation options however appear to be less common.

Figure 10: The Availability of Emergency Accommodation Options for Young Homeless People

The use of B&Bs to accommodate young homeless people raises safeguarding concerns due to the
vulnerability of young people. Ten local authority respondents discussed the use of B&B accommodation with young people. Eight (80%) respondents reported that B&B accommodation is ‘rarely’ used and one (10%) that it is ‘never’ used. One (10%) respondent, however, reported it to be ‘commonly’ used. This reflects the findings of previous years, where the North East has always reported low levels of the use of B&Bs to accommodate young people (YHNE 2012, 2013).

Respondents had mixed perceptions about changes to the availability of emergency accommodation options for young homeless people since February 2013. Local authorities most commonly reported that there had been no changes to the number of Crashpad, Nightstop, youth specific assessment centre, all-age emergency hostel and supported lodgings beds available across the North East. However, as to be expected, five respondents suggested that the provision of NSNO accommodation had increased.

**Long Term Accommodation Options**

The figure below outlines the availability of long term accommodation options for young homeless people across eight local authority areas. It indicates that most local authority areas in question have a range of long term accommodation options for homeless young people, including self-contained units with floating support, supported lodgings, shared housing with floating support and hostels/foyers. There is a lack, however, of long stay accommodation options specifically for those in education, training and employment. Data from previous surveys suggests that accommodation options for those in education, training and employment has typically been in limited supply (YHNE, 2012, 2013).

![Figure 11: The Availability of Long Term Accommodation Options for Young Homeless People](image)

Local authority respondents almost unanimously reported no changes to the availability of long stay accommodation options over the period February 2013 to February 2014.

**Move-On Accommodation**

To prevent repeat homelessness amongst young people, local authorities need to be proactive about sourcing suitable move-on accommodation that young people can afford, whether private rented or social
housing. Figure 12 shows the extent to which the local authorities taking part in the research have developed a range of schemes to support young people to access move-on housing.

**Figure 12: The Availability of Move-On Support in February 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Local Authorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social lettings agency</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent deposit/cashless bond scheme</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with private landlords</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private lettings agency</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared accommodation options with private landlords</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All eight (100%) local authorities who answered the question reported having a rent deposit or cashless bond scheme which young people can access.

Seven (87.5%) reported having relationships with private sector landlords willing to consider young people as tenants. Conflicting data was provided by respondents in one local authority area.

Six (75%) local authorities reported having developed shared accommodation options with private landlords for young people. One (12.5%) does not. One (12.5%) local authority reported that this is in planning.

Five (62.5%) local authorities reported having a private lettings agency which can assist young people to find accommodation in the private rented sector. Three (37.5%) do not have this type of agency established.

Of eight local authorities, three (37.5%) reported having a social lettings agency, while three (37.5%) reported that they do not. Respondents from two local authorities provided conflicting information on this.\(^4\)

Local authority respondents were evenly split in their perceptions about where most young homeless people move on to following stays in supported accommodation. Three (33%) reported that young people most frequently move on to accommodation in the private rented sector, local authority-owned housing and housing association-owned housing, respectively.

**Homelessness Strategies**

\(^4\)Due to conflicting data in this section of the survey, it is not possible to determine whether levels of move-on support have increased or decreased since February 2013.
Seven of eight (87.5%) local authorities reported that their local housing allocation strategies take into account the needs of young homeless people. For example, four reported that higher priority banding for social housing is given to anyone moving on from supported accommodation. This also applies to those who are at risk of being homeless as a result of relationship breakdown with family and those living in overcrowded conditions. Another reported that the needs of young people are discussed within the Vulnerable Persons Strategic Housing Group (a multi-agency group that meet periodically and develops strategic action plans to resolve the housing issues of vulnerable groups in the area).

Just one of seven (14%) local authorities reported having a youth homelessness strategy.

**Welfare Reform**

A number of changes have been made to Housing Benefit in the past few years and some changes will be implemented as part of Universal Credit.

**Table 2: The Impacts of Welfare Reform on Young People's Housing Needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Yes, a great deal</th>
<th>Yes, quite a bit</th>
<th>Yes, somewhat</th>
<th>Yes, but very little</th>
<th>No, not at all</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The impact of the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) on young people’s ability to access accommodation</td>
<td>6 (43%)</td>
<td>4 (29%)</td>
<td>3 (21%)</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The capping of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to the 30th percentile market rent on young people’s ability to access accommodation</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
<td>6 (40%)</td>
<td>6 (40%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of the rise in LHA to the 30th percentile market rent or inflation if lower on the ability of young people to access accommodation</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
<td>4 (29%)</td>
<td>4 (29%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (29%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of LHA/SAR changes on the willingness of landlords to accept young tenants/homeless tenants</td>
<td>4 (30%)</td>
<td>2 (14%)</td>
<td>3 (21%)</td>
<td>2 (14%)</td>
<td>3 (21%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The introduction of the bedroom tax on young people’s ability to access secure accommodation</td>
<td>6 (54%)</td>
<td>2 (18%)</td>
<td>1 (9%)</td>
<td>1 (9%)</td>
<td>1 (9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the welfare reforms listed above were reported to be affecting young people’s ability to access and sustain housing, either directly through reductions in housing benefit, or indirectly through changing the attitudes of private landlords towards young/homeless tenants. The extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate and the introduction of the ‘Bedroom Tax’ to social housing were reporting to be having the greatest impacts on young people, with 72% of respondents reporting that they are impacting ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a bit’, respectively. Some of the comments of respondents included:

‘Private landlords are increasingly unwilling to give young tenants a chance’

‘There are less properties available to access as landlords are not willing to accept one client in a 2-bed...’
property any longer’

‘We are still able to access accommodation but it is with a reduced number of landlords willing to accept young people’

‘There are sufficient properties, but the impact is in relation to bedroom tax, so applicants are loathe to accept a larger property, or sometimes fail to appreciate the impact regardless of pre-tenancy advice’

Homelessness agencies and housing associations were asked about the broader elements of welfare reform of most concern to young homeless people. All eight (100%) respondents to this question were in agreement that the Bedroom Tax, benefit sanctions and the introduction of Universal Credit were of most concern to young people. The extension of the SAR and benefit sanctions, were identified as having the biggest effect on young people at the national level (Homeless Link, 2014).

In addition, it was generally reported that young people have a limited understanding of welfare reform. Six housing associations and two homelessness agencies (89%) suggested that young people’s understanding is poor, while one (11%) homelessness agencies suggested it is very poor. Young people’s limited understanding of changes to the benefits system has been highlighted in several other studies (see, for example, YMCA, 2014a, 2014b).

When asked about the impacts of welfare reform on the wellbeing and behaviours of young people, the following effects were reported.

Table 3: The Impacts of Welfare Reform on Young People’s Wellbeing and Behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Yes, a great deal</th>
<th>Yes, quite a bit</th>
<th>Yes, somewhat</th>
<th>Yes, but very little</th>
<th>No, not at all</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food poverty</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel poverty</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>2 (33%)</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater financial hardship</td>
<td>5 (56%)</td>
<td>4 (44%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased stress/anxiety</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased mental health problems</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased problems of addiction</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased levels of offending</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td>2 (30%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in illegal money lending</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in informal money lending</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in legal money</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less confidence to move on</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased tensions within families</td>
<td>3 (43%)</td>
<td>3 (43%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased tensions between friends</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicates that the biggest impacts of welfare reform on young people are general financial hardship, food poverty, increased stress/anxiety, increased mental health problems and less confidence to move on. These findings were also highlighted by NEHTT (2014).

Respondents highlighted a range of examples which they consider to be ‘best practice’ responses to welfare reform. Several organisations drew attention to the benefits of strategic planning, partnership working and good communication between local authorities and homeless and housing agencies in
managing the effects of welfare reform.

Others highlighted the value of the appointment and bolstering of welfare rights and financial inclusion officers/teams within services, which aim to improve young people’s understanding of welfare reform and offer them practical advice and assistance with navigating the benefits system.

Several organisations have produced accessible information resources on welfare reform for young clients and introduced regular one-to-one meetings with clients to discuss the changes to the benefits system and their engagement with this. This has proven particularly important in respect of preventing clients from being sanctioned.

Finally, one housing provider highlighted the benefits of developing partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and other employment support providers in order to better support young people into work.
Conclusions

Sadly, this year’s research presents a bleaker and more challenging picture than that found in 12 months previously. Youth homelessness (particularly among people aged 20-24 years old) in the North East appears to be increasing, at the same time as needs appears to be becoming more complex. Furthermore, the welfare reforms implemented since 2012 and the region’s weak economic environment are putting increasing pressure on young people's ability to access and sustain housing, experiences of financial hardship, family relationships and health and wellbeing; thus, making it more likely that young people will become homeless and will remain trapped in homelessness for longer periods of time.

The commitment, however, of local authorities, housing associations and homelessness agencies in the North East, to tackling youth homelessness should be commended. The research suggests not only that levels of prevention, accommodation and support services for young people appear to have remained relatively unchanged over the past 12 months, but also that organisations have engaged in higher levels of strategic planning and developed a broader range of support services and working practices in order to ensure that young people have been given good levels of support to help them to comply with the revised benefits system.

They key challenges for the region’s homelessness sector remain unchanged to those identified last year. A key service gap in the region appears to be around young people with complex needs who are reported to be a growing population within the youth homelessness sector. This is particularly in respect of emergency accommodation, when young people have not been able to maintain the supported accommodation options previously offered to them. Unemployment is prevalent among young people in the North East, but is particularly true of homeless young people. Supporting young people into employment appears ever more critical in light of changes to the benefits system. Positively, a number of local authorities, housing associations and homelessness providers have developed new and existing employment schemes, but at time of funding cuts, high levels of competition for jobs in the North East and young people’s needs becoming more complex, supporting people into employment is not an easy task. Welfare reform also remains a challenge. The research clearly evidences that the Bedroom Tax, extension of the SAR and sanctions are limiting young people’s ability to access both social and private rented accommodation and placing families and young people under greater levels of financial and emotional stress. Furthermore, the consequences of the introduction of Universal Credit for young people could be severe. Ensuring young people’s access to safe, affordable and sustainable housing options for young people.

It seems to be clear that many of the problems associated with youth homelessness in the North East have their roots in central government policy, thus limiting the effectiveness of local policy and practice in the management and prevention of youth homelessness. As such, real change s only likely to occur following policy change at the national level. Indeed, one survey respondents described young people as a ‘species in danger’ as a result of central government policy.

YHNE, as part of the North East Homeless Think Tank (NEHTT) will soon be launching a Homelessness Charter, which we would like all local authorities, MPs, housing associations, homelessness agencies, related agencies and members of the public in the North East to sign up to in the run up to the General Election 2015. The Charter will outline a series of pledges which we believe will enable a better
understanding and the more effective prevention and management of homelessness in England. The Chatter will include a focus on:

- The definition and measuring of single homelessness.
- The use of unsupported temporary accommodation for the accommodation of vulnerable people.
- Specialist and needs-appropriate support for those with complex needs and offenders.
- Access to social housing as a right, not a privilege.
- The regulation of the private rented sector.
- The ending of the sanctions regime.
- Appropriate employment support for vulnerable people.

For further information, please follow us on Twitter: @YouthHomelessNE and @NEHomelessTT.

References


