



**youth homeless north east**  
prevent. tackle. resolve

## Youth Homelessness in the North East Survey

September 2012

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The work involved in producing the survey was directed and overseen by a YHNE working group comprising Barnabas Safe and Sound, Barnardo's in Northumberland and Northumberland County Council.

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**Millfield House  
Foundation**



## **CONTENTS**

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
Background to the Research	7
Methodology	7
The Sample	8
National and Local Context	8
<b>Survey Findings</b>	<b>10</b>
The Extent of Youth Homelessness	10
The Causes of Youth Homelessness	12
Preventing Youth Homelessness	13
The Support Needs of Young Homeless People	15
Support Services for Young Homeless People	17
Service Gaps	20
Good Practice	22
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>28</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Project Overview**

In March 2011, Youth Homeless North East surveyed local authorities and homelessness service providers in the North East to gain an understanding of the nature and extent of youth homelessness (16 – 24 year olds). Substantial responses were received from 15 respondents across 10 local authorities and from 19 homeless service providers, although not all questions were answered by every respondent.

### **Survey Findings**

#### *The Extent of Youth Homelessness*

In February 2012, approximately 533 young people presented to local authorities as homeless or in need of housing advice and support. This equates to an average of 53 young people per local authority. Homeless service providers, meanwhile, supported approx. 870 young people. This equates to an average of 46 young clients per provider.

6 out of 10 local authorities (60%) reported that the number of young people presenting as homeless or seeking housing advice in February 2012 had increased compared to the position 12 months previously. Of 6 providers who cater for homeless people of all ages, 4 (80%) reported an increase in the proportion of young clients seeking support.

In February 2012, local authorities reported that the majority of young people presenting were at the higher end of the 16 – 24 age bracket, with 59% on average being aged 20+. Conversely, only 21% of provider clients on average were aged 20+. In the 12 months leading up to February 2012, both local authorities and providers reported that new clients were more likely to be aged 20+.

#### *The Causes of Youth Homelessness*

Relationship breakdown with family was the most common cause of youth homelessness.

The majority of young people lived in social housing (either their family home or their own tenancy) immediately prior to becoming homeless.

#### *Preventing Youth Homelessness*

9 out of 15 local authority respondents (60%) said that homelessness prevention education work in schools or other youth provision was delivered in their area. 7 out of 8 local authorities who answered the question (88%) have a joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services in place.

On average, local authorities prevent homelessness from actually occurring in just over one third of cases where young people approached them as homeless, although results range from 9% to 69%.

5 out of 7 local authorities (71%) have access to a mediation services to support their work with young people. All 7 local authorities who answered the question undertake home visits.

The most common outcomes of prevention efforts are: young people moving into longer stay supported accommodation, young people returning to the family home and young people entering a new social tenancy.

### *The Support Needs of Young Homeless People*

The most frequently occurring support needs of young people are: lack of independent living skills, lack of relationship skills, financial difficulties and not being in education, employment or training.

Across 14 providers, an average of 43% of new young clients had experienced rough sleeping in January and February 2012. Almost half of providers felt that this figure represented an increase on the previous year.

On average, 2% of young people who presented to local authorities were classed as rough sleepers, 2% were classed as care leavers and 10% were classed as young offenders.

### *Support Services for Young Homeless People*

Most local authority respondents reported no change in the availability of assessment and prevention services in February 2012 compared to 12 months previously. Indeed, most providers had maintained or even increased the range of services they offer to homeless young people during that time.

Almost one third of providers (5 out of 16) reported that they had been unable to assist some young homeless people because of capacity constraints in January and February 2012.

Despite the availability of emergency temporary accommodation for young people remaining largely unchanged over a 12 month period, providers generally reported a shortage of such accommodation.

The use of B&B accommodation was most commonly described as 'unusual, but it does happen'. 14% (1 out of 7) reported that it is 'never' used and 29% (2 out of 7) said it is used 'sometimes'.

6 out of 7 local authority respondents (86%) said they have private landlords who are willing to offer tenancies to young people and 6 out of 7 (86%) have a cashless bond or rent deposit scheme which young people can access. Only 3 out of 7 local authorities (43%) have developed shared accommodation options and only 2 out of 7 (29%) have a social lettings agency.

### *Service Gaps*

Local authorities and providers reported difficulties securing move on accommodation for young people in light of social housing shortages and welfare reforms which appear to have limited the willingness of private landlords to offer tenancies to young people. Accommodation for young people with complex needs was also reported to be in short supply.

### *Good Practice*

'Gateways' to co-ordinate homelessness services within local authority areas and a range of prevention approaches were highlighted as areas of good practice in the North East.

### **Conclusion**

The picture of youth homelessness in the North East largely reflects the national picture identified by Homeless Link in autumn 2011. The following approaches are recommended as good practice for organisations in the North East:

- Strategic commitment to supporting young homeless people

- Understanding and protecting 'what works'
- Maintaining a focus on prevention
- Adapting to change and seizing opportunities
- Supporting young people with complex needs
- Helping young people access and sustain move on accommodation
- Addressing financial exclusion among young people

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background to the Research**

In December 2011, Homeless Link – the national membership organisation for agencies working with people who are homeless – produced the Homelesswatch report, '*Young and Homeless*'. The report outlined the findings of research undertaken in autumn 2011 regarding the nature and extent of youth homelessness in England. Specifically, the research sought to identify:

- How many single people aged under 25 came into contact with frontline homelessness agencies and housing options teams within a snapshot month and how this had changed from the previous 12 months.
- The primary causes of homelessness amongst young people and how these had changed from the previous 12 months.
- The support needs of young homeless people.
- The availability of services to prevent and alleviate homelessness and whether capacity constraints had increased from the previous 12 months.

The research was carried out through two online surveys; one tailored to local authorities and the other to providers of homelessness services for young people.

Few local authorities and service providers in the North East responded to the survey and the North East was highlighted as under-represented in the survey findings.

In March 2011, Youth Homeless North East sought to address this by re-circulating the surveys – albeit with slight changes. The aims of the exercise matched those outlined above, but included the additional aim of assessing the local picture in comparison to the national picture. This report presents the findings of the research, which it is hoped will help inform future strategy and service provision in the North East.

### **Methodology**

Two online surveys were developed; the first for local authorities and the second for providers of accommodation and support services for young homeless people. The surveys largely reflected those used by Homeless Link in 2011 to ensure that the data collected was comparable with national data. The local authority survey used by Homeless Link was developed with input from the Department for Communities and Local Government. The provider survey was developed with input from Centrepoint, St. Basil's and DePaul UK; all charities with expertise in working with young homeless people. Both questionnaires consisted of a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions and asked for information relating to 'single homeless people aged 16-24'. The surveys referred to two time frames: February 2012 for snapshot figures and the previous 12 months for the assessment of changes over time.

### **The Sample**

15 responses were received from 10 local authorities in the North East. 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.

23 services providers responded to the survey. Four service providers provided very limited returns so their responses were excluded from the analysis. Not all remaining respondents answered all questions.

Baseline figures are given for the separate findings presented. The smaller the baseline (denoted by 'n'), the fewer respondents provided information and the less confident we can be that the findings are representative of youth homelessness across the North East.

Individual responses have been anonymised within the findings.

## **National and Local Context**

Homeless Link conducted the original research in response to anecdotal reports of increased youth homelessness in 2011. Official data at the time provided conflicting assessments of youth homelessness levels. For example: CHAIN data dating back to 2006 suggested that the proportion of young people sleeping rough in London increased from 8% to 10% between 2006/07 and the first eight months of 2011/12. Conversely, national 'Supporting People' (SP) client records indicated that the number of 'young people at risk' peaked in 2009/2010 and has since decreased – although this could be due to service closures and reduced bed spaces, rather than an indication of reduced demand (Homeless Link, 2011).

Young people have faced significant social and economic challenges in recent years which are likely to have made the transition from childhood to adulthood difficult. The 2008 recession resulted in high levels of unemployment, particularly for vulnerable young people with low educational attainment (Homeless Link, 2011). Problems of financial exclusion are likely to have been reinforced and compounded by the changes brought about by the Welfare Reform Act 2012, but particularly change to housing benefits. Since April 2011, changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) have meant that: claimants can no longer keep the excess Housing Benefit (HB) of up to £15 per week if their rent is below the LHA rate; LHA weekly rates have been capped; LHA rates have been set at the 30th percentile of rents in each broad rental market area, rather than the median; the LHA Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) age increased from 25 to 35; and, LHA payments are now made direct to claimants rather than landlords. From April 2013 onwards: HB will be restricted for working age claimants in the social rented sector who are occupying a larger property than their household size warrants; the maximum amount of benefits an out of work household can claim will be capped; and, LHA rates will be up-rated by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than with reference to local rents (Shelter, 2011). In order to create further savings to the welfare bill, it has also been suggested that housing benefit for those under the age of 25 may be cut altogether.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 ushers in the greatest changes to welfare benefits in sixty years. The changes will have far reaching impacts for benefit claimants, but particularly for young, single person households (Homeless Link, 2012). The impacts of the changes are likely to include: increased rent arrears, evictions, homelessness; the greater use of substandard or overcrowded accommodation; increases in household debt; and, the possible greater use of unlicensed money lenders. Reductions in household income are also likely to increase tensions within families and lead to more relationship breakdowns that cause homelessness.

In the event of homelessness, it is unlikely that young people will find secure accommodation in the social rented sector due to housing shortages and the



Localism Bill (which has given local authorities powers to discharge their homelessness duty to the private rented sector).

Young people from low income households are also likely to have been negatively affected by cuts in public funding for youth services. In 2010, the youth sector lost 23% of its total income, leading to a wide range of service closures. Often these organisations are located in the most deprived parts of the country, where young people are most likely to depend upon their support (Homeless Link, 2011).

The challenges outlined above are particularly salient for the North East which is a region plagued by economic fragility and disadvantage, resulting in high levels of benefit dependency. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 indicated that the North East contains 12% of the 1% most deprived neighbourhoods and 10% of the top 5% most deprived neighbourhood in England (DCLG, 2010). Household incomes in the North East are the lowest in England. In 2007/08 to 2009/10, 24% of the local population was living in households with incomes below the poverty threshold. The North East has among the highest proportions of one person households (30% in 2010) and lone parent households with dependent children (7.7%) in the UK. The North East has the highest level of benefit dependency in England (with the lowest rate of claimants currently in employment, the lowest overall employment rate and the highest unemployment and economic inactivity rates) (Fenton, 2010). Limited employment opportunities make it less likely that low-income households will be able to escape their reliance on welfare and improve their residential mobility. Finally, housing shortages in parts of the North East are higher than in any other area of the country and social housing stocks are under heavy pressure. Social housing stocks have reduced by 36% in the last 30 years, such that, now, one in eight households are on a housing waiting list (compared to one in 13 households nationally) (National Housing Federation, 2011). Over half of working age households living in social housing in the North East are likely to be affected by the under-occupation cuts, losing an average of £624 a year due to the 'spare bedroom tax' (National Housing Federation, 2011).

Homeless Link described the combination of economic hardship, housing deficits and welfare reform as a 'perfect storm' for homelessness (Homeless Link, 2012). This makes the provision of effective housing related-support services in the North East increasingly critical. But, this comes at a time when the homelessness sector is already under significant strain. Recent research into the state of the homelessness sector in the North East found that despite public sector funding cuts and the removal of the Supporting People ring-fence, there is an ongoing commitment within local authorities to maintain homelessness services, but the extent to which this will be possible in future years varies significantly across the region. Cuts are being acutely felt by large local authorities with significant rural areas and small local authorities where there is little scope for the scaling back of services. In 2011/12, local authorities generally took the decision to safeguard frontline services, with the emphasis being on the re-negotiation of contracts to deliver efficiency saving but future cuts are significantly more likely to result in the decommissioning of services. Meanwhile, 90% of providers reported increased demand for services of 10-15%, whilst being forced to absorb funding cuts of a similar scale (Irving, 2012).

## **SURVEY FINDINGS**

### **The Extent of Youth Homelessness**

Data obtained from local authorities revealed that approximately 533 young people presented as homeless or in need of housing advice in February 2012<sup>1</sup>. Although individual responses varied from 7 to 142 – reflecting factors such as the different sizes of local authority areas and levels of service provision – the average number of new youth homelessness cases per local authority was 53.

Approximately 870 young people were supported by 19 homeless service providers in February 2012. Although numbers varied widely between providers, ranging from 2 to 200 young people, this equates to an average of 46 clients per provider. The wide variation is likely to be a result of the different scale of individual providers and the fact that some work solely with young people while, for others, young people represent only a small proportion of their client group. 13 of 19 providers were dedicated young people's services. Of the 6 providers who support people of all ages, young people accounted for 60% of their total client base on average.

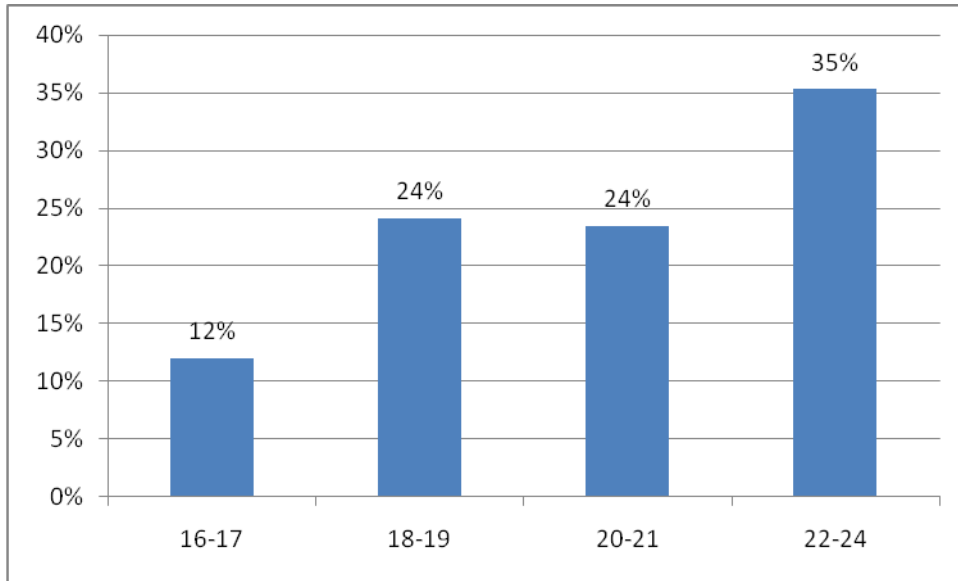
6 out of 10 local authorities (60%) reported that the number of young people presenting as homeless or seeking housing advice had increased compared to the situation 12 months previously. This reflects the picture seen nationally in October 2011, where 48% of local authorities reported an increase in the number of young people presenting (Homeless Link, 2011). Of the 6 providers who cater for a range of client groups, 4 (66%) had seen an increase in the proportion of young clients seeking support.

### ***Age Distribution of Young Homeless People***

Local authority data indicated that the majority of young people who presented as homeless or in need of housing advice in February 2012 were at the higher end of the '16 to 24' age bracket. On average, 59% of clients were aged 20-24 (over a third of clients were aged 22-24 and a quarter were aged 20-21). Less than a quarter were aged 18-19 and only 12% belonged to the lowest age bracket of 16-17.

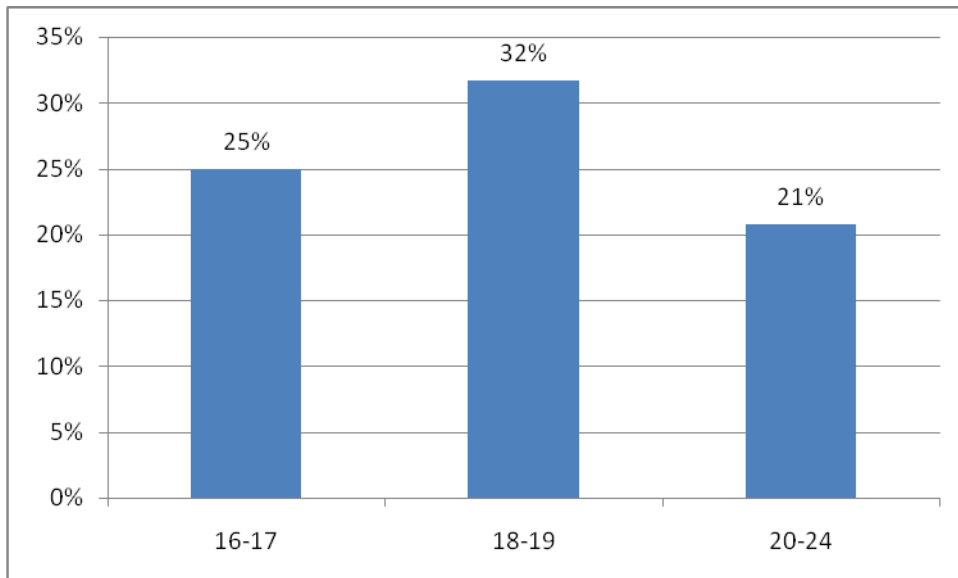
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<sup>1</sup> The highest estimate was used where two different figures were provided for a single local authority.



**Figure 1: Age Distribution of Young Homeless People Presenting to Local Authorities in February 2012**

These figures contrast with the provider data. Based on 17 provider responses, on average, almost 25% of young clients were aged 16-17, 32% of young clients were aged 18-19 and just 21% were aged 20-24.



**Figure 2: Age Distribution of Young Homeless People Supported by Providers in February 2012**

On the whole, local authorities did not report that there had been a significant increase in the number of young people presenting at the lower end of the age bracket compared to 12 months previously. Of 12 local authorities where the question was answered, 4 (33%) reported that the proportion of new clients aged 16-17 had increased, 4 (33%) reported that the proportion had decreased, 2 (17%) reported seeing no change and 2 (17%) did not know.

Increases were more likely to be reported for the older age categories. Based on 11 responses, 6 (55%) thought that the proportion of young people aged 18-19 had

increased, 5 (45%) thought the proportion of young people aged 20-21 had increased and 5 (55%) thought the proportion of young people aged 22-24 had increased.

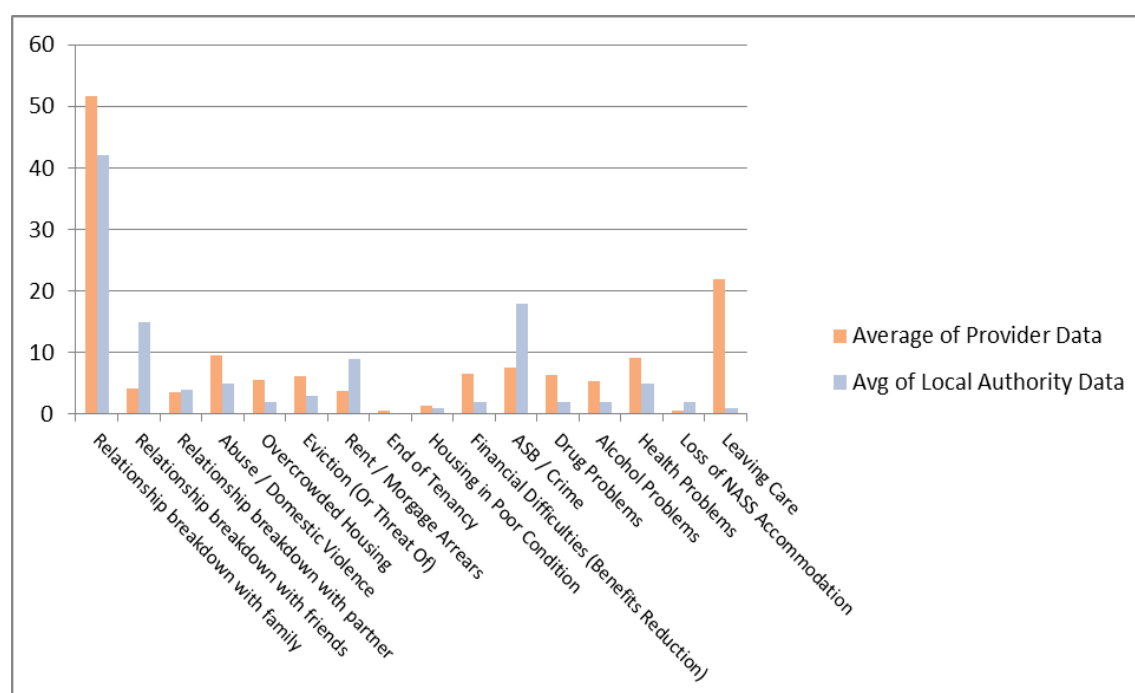
Similar to local authorities, only one third of providers (5 out of 15) reported an increase in clients in the lower age brackets (16-17 and 18-19), while 54% (7 out of 13) reported an increase in clients aged 20-24.

These trends are consistent with national data, showing that approximately 45% of local authorities and providers reported that the biggest increase in youth homelessness was among young people aged 20-24, compared to 39% of respondents who reported an increased in homelessness among young people aged 16-19 over a 12 month period (Homeless Link, 2011).

### The Causes of Homelessness

Reflecting national data, the records of both local authorities and service providers showed that the single most common cause of homelessness among young people in February 2012 was 'relationship breakdown with family'. On average, this was experienced by 52% of young people accessing support from providers (based on 15 responses) and 42% of young people accessing support from local authorities (based on 7 responses).

Beyond relationship breakdown with family, there were some differences between local authorities and service providers in the main reported causes of homelessness of young clients. The average percentages of young people experiencing different causes of homelessness are shown in the chart below.



**Figure 3: Breakdown of the Causes of Homelessness among Local Authority and Provider Clients (%)**

As can be seen from the graph above, the most common causes of homelessness reported by local authorities after relationship breakdown with the family were: anti-social behaviour (18%) and relationship breakdown with friends (15%). For providers, the equivalent causes were: leaving care (22%) and abuse / violence (10%).

The disparity between the local authority and provider figures regarding the number of young people who became homeless as a result of leaving care reflects that a number of providers catered specifically for care leavers.

The survey data provided a complex picture of how the causes of youth homelessness have changed over the past 12 months. Local authorities reported the greatest changes in:

- Relationship breakdown with family (6 out of 7 respondents reported an increase)
- Abuse / Violence (3 out of 5 respondents reported an increase)
- Anti-social behaviour / Crime (3 out of 5 respondents reported an increase)
- Relationship breakdown with friends (3 out of 6 respondents reported an increase)
- Relationship breakdown with a partner (3 out of 6 respondents reported an increase)
- Financial pressures caused by benefits reduction (3 out of 6 respondents reported an increase)

Positively, 3 out of 6 local authority respondents (50%) reported a decrease in levels of youth homelessness as a result of eviction or the threat of eviction.

Service providers were most likely to report an increase in homelessness due to relationship breakdown with family (6 out of 13 providers reported this). Providers were most likely to report no change in relation to: alcohol problems; leaving care; eviction or threat of eviction; end of tenure; anti-social behaviour; overcrowded housing; housing in poor condition; or, loss of NASS accommodation.

### ***Accommodation Prior to Becoming Homeless***

Providers were asked about the last settled accommodation that young clients had been living in prior to becoming homeless. On average, providers reported that over half of young people (52%)<sup>2</sup> lived in social housing (either their family home or their own tenancy) immediately prior to becoming homeless, 20%<sup>3</sup> were in care, 15%<sup>4</sup> lived in the private rented sector and 13%<sup>5</sup> lived in the owner occupied sector. At the national level, the biggest proportion of young clients (33%) lived in social housing immediately prior to becoming homeless (Homeless Link, 2011).

Of 15 providers, almost half reported that there had been little change in the housing circumstances of young people immediately prior to becoming homeless in the 12 months leading up to February 2012.

### **Preventing Youth Homelessness**

#### ***Early Intervention***

Local authorities across England undertake early intervention work with the aim of preventing youth homelessness and raising awareness of the impacts of homelessness (Homeless Link, 2011).

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<sup>2</sup> n = 9

<sup>3</sup> n = 10

<sup>4</sup> n = 7

<sup>5</sup> n = 10

9 out of 15 local authority respondents (60%) said that homelessness prevention education work in schools or other youth provision was delivered in their area<sup>6</sup>. 7 out of 15 (47%) said that their Children's Services and Housing departments work together to target young people under the age of 16 and their families where there are clear trigger factors indicating 'homelessness as a possibility aged 16/17'.<sup>7</sup> These figures are broadly similar to those at the national level, of 55% and 43% respectively (Homeless Link, 2011).

### ***Prevention***

As well as conducting early intervention, local authorities aim to support the young people who present as homeless to avoid them needing to make an application to the local authority for assistance (Homeless Link, 2011).

Based on 7 responses, local authorities prevent homelessness occurring in 38% of cases where young people present as homeless – although results range from 9% to 75%. The average national figure is 54% (Homeless Link, 2011).

5 out of 7 responding local authorities (71%) have access to mediation services to support their work with young people and all 7 who answered the question undertake home visits. The national figure is 73% (Homeless Link, 2011).

### ***The Outcomes of Homelessness Prevention***

On average, the most frequently occurring outcomes of homelessness prevention services are: young people moving into longer stay supported accommodation (25%)<sup>8</sup>, young people returning to the family home (24%)<sup>9</sup>, young people entering a new social tenancy (18.5%)<sup>10</sup> and young people entering a new private tenancy (7%)<sup>11</sup>. This last outcome is likely to become increasingly common in light of social housing shortages and recent welfare reforms.

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<sup>6</sup> Conflicting responses from respondents within the same local authority were provided so a breakdown of results by local authority cannot be provided.

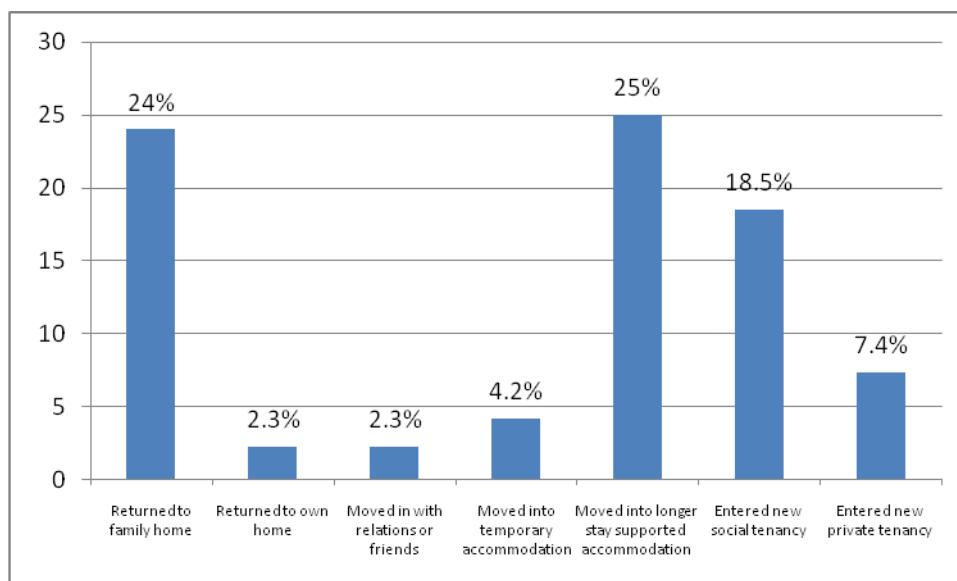
<sup>7</sup> There was some disagreement between respondents in the same local authorities regarding early intervention, so a breakdown of results by local authority area is not possible.

<sup>8</sup> n = 6

<sup>9</sup> n = 8

<sup>10</sup> n = 8

<sup>11</sup> n = 6



**Figure 4: The Proportion of Prevention Cases Resulting in a Range of Outcomes**

Nationally, the most common outcomes of prevention work are young people returning to the family home (28%), young people moving into longer stay temporary accommodation (22%) and young people entering a new social tenancy (11%). Only 7% of young people enter new social tenancies and (Homeless Link, 2011).

### ***Joint Working to Support Homeless 16-17 Year Olds***

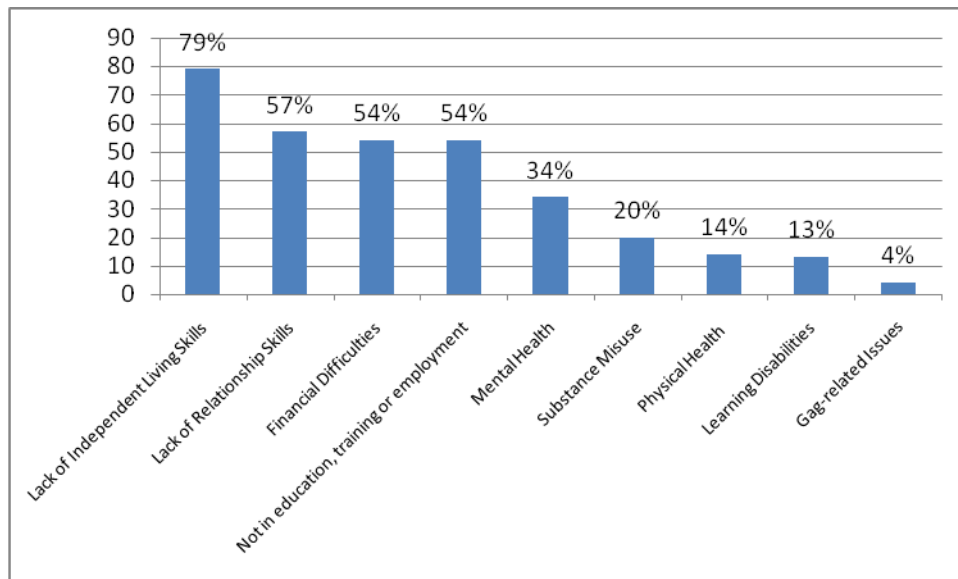
7 out of 8 local authorities (86%) have a formal joint protocol in place which outlines the roles and responsibilities of housing and children's services towards 16 & 17 year olds. The mean number of young people who had been through the protocol was 55 per local authority (based on 6 responses).

The majority of respondents (5 out of 7 or 71%) felt that joint working between housing teams and children's services was effective. Those who reported that joint working was ineffective (29%) felt that children's services did not always accept their new responsibilities. Respondents suggested that the co-location of teams would be likely to improve the effectiveness of joint working arrangements.

### **The Support Needs of Young Homeless People**

The young people accessing homelessness services and support from local authorities and providers have a range of complex support needs. The chart below shows how frequently different types of support need were recorded.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The number of providers who reported on each type of support need varied from 10 to 14.



**Figure 5: Average Frequency of Support Needs among Young Clients**

The provider data suggested that the most frequently occurring support needs of young clients are: lack of independent living skills (in 75% of cases)<sup>13</sup>, lack of relationship skills (in 57% of cases); financial difficulties (in 54% of cases)<sup>14</sup> and not being in education, employment or training (in 44% of cases).<sup>15</sup> Whilst problems of substance misuse and poor mental health are not the most common issues faced by young people, they affect significant minorities. These findings are broadly similar to those found at the national level.

### ***Rough sleeping***

On average, providers reported that 43%<sup>16</sup> of new young clients had slept rough in January and February 2012. This is significantly higher than the proportion reported in national research in autumn 2011, where the reported figure was 26%. Almost half of providers felt that this figure represented an increase on the previous year and 29% felt there had been no change. Only 14% felt that levels of rough sleeping experienced by young people had decreased.

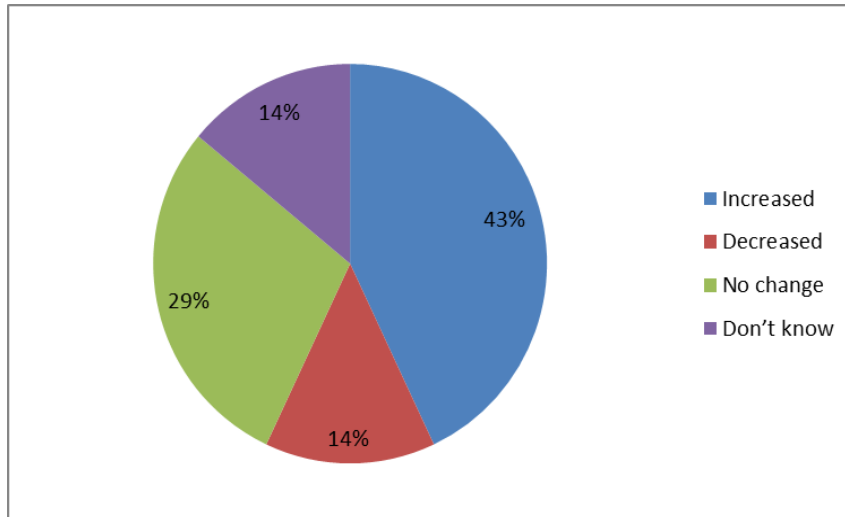
<sup>13</sup> n = 13

<sup>14</sup> n = 12

<sup>15</sup> n = 14

<sup>16</sup> n = 14





**Figure 6: Changes to the Proportion of Young People who had Slept Rough in a 12 Month Period**

Based on data from 8 local authorities, just 2% of young people who presented in February 2012 were rough sleeping at the time of their presentation. As an indication of total numbers, 2% of the average monthly caseload of 53 is 1.

#### ***Care leavers***

Based on data from 8 local authorities, just 2% of young people who presented in February 2012 were care leavers. As an indication of total numbers, 2% of the average monthly caseload of 53 is 1.

#### ***Young Offenders***

Based on data from 8 local authorities, on average, 10% of young people who presented in February 2012 were young offenders. As an indication of total numbers, 10% of the average monthly caseload of 53 is 5.

#### **Support Services for Young Homeless People**

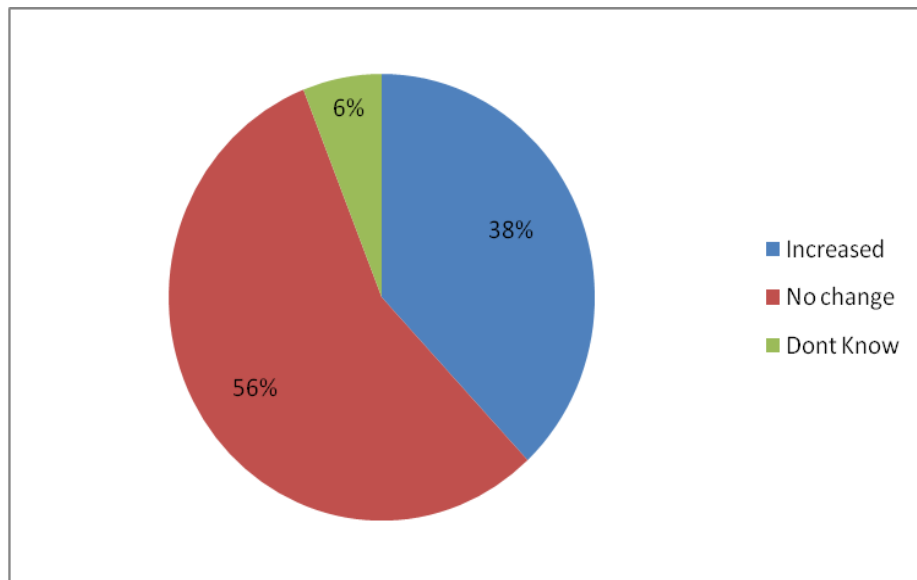
5 out of 8 local authority respondents (63%) reported there had been no change in the availability of assessment and prevention services provided in the previous 12 months. A similar proportion (4 out of 6 local authority respondents or 67%) reported that there had been no change in the availability of assessment and prevention services provided by voluntary sector agencies in that period. Just 3 out of 8 respondents (38%) reported an increase in local authority services and 1 out of 6 (17%) reported an increase in voluntary sector services. No providers reported a decrease in local authority services and only 17% reported a decrease in voluntary sector services.

Almost one third of providers (5 out of 16) reported that they had been unable to assist some young homeless people because of capacity constraints in January and February 2012. When asked how many young people they had turned away, the average number across providers was 13, although responses ranged from 0 to 49.

69% of providers (9 out of 16) reported that capacity had not impacted on the number of new clients they were able to accept. This figure demonstrates a lower impact on new clients in the North East as opposed to the national level, where the figure was

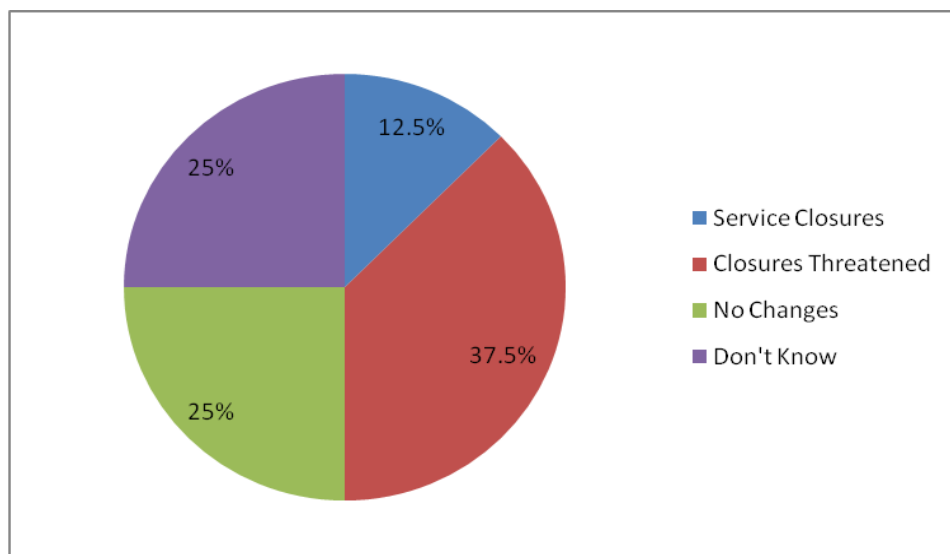
48% (Homeless Link, 2011). Both figures are of concern in light of increasing demand for services.

Despite being unable to help some young people, 94% of providers (15 out of 16) reported that in the last year they had maintained or increased the range of services they offer to young homeless people. Specifically, 38% (6 out of 16) reported that they had increased their provision of support services compared to the previous 12 months and 56% (9 out of 16) reported that levels of provision had remained unchanged. No providers had decreased their provision.



**Figure 7: Changes in the Provision of Support Services offered by Providers in a 12 Month Period**

Providers were less positive about the availability of services provided externally with just over a quarter (27% or 4 out of 15) reporting a decrease in provision over a 12 month period. Changes were most frequently reported in the areas of mental health, advocacy and employability services. Roughly half (53% or 8 out of 15) of providers suggested that availability was unchanged.

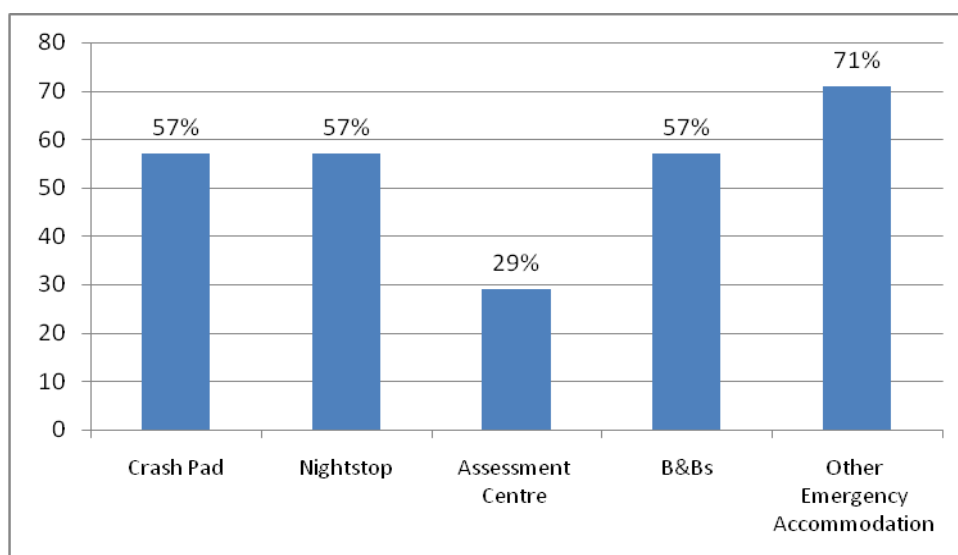


**Figure 8: Changes in the Availability of External Services in a 12 Month Period**

16 providers across 8 local authority areas responded on changes to the availability of youth services as a result of funding cuts. Just 12.5% (2 out of 16) reported that local authorities had closed some youth services as a result of the cuts. 37.5% (6 out of 16) said that closures were threatened in the future but had not been made, 25% (4 out of 16) were not aware of the risk of service closures and 25% (4 out of 16) did not know.

### **Availability of Emergency Accommodation**

Local authorities make use of emergency, temporary accommodation to house young people who present as homeless when they have been accepted as statutory homeless. They also commission the voluntary and community sector to provide temporary accommodation to both statutory and non-statutory homeless young people (Homeless Link 2011). Based on 7 responses, the following table outlines the proportion of local authorities with access to different types of temporary accommodation considered suitable for young people:



**Figure 9: Availability of Temporary Accommodation within Local Authorities**

When asked how the availability of different forms of temporary accommodation had changed in the 12 months leading up to February 2012, the majority of both local authority respondents and providers reported that the availability of provision overall had not changed. However, 4 out of 7 local authority respondents (57%) reported an increase in crash pad provision and 2 out of 6 (33%) reported an increase in nightstop provision, while 6 out of 15 providers (40%) an increase in crash pad provision and 2 out of 15 (15%) an increase in nightstop provision. These findings reflect national trends.

### **Bed and Breakfasts (B&Bs)**

The use of B&Bs to accommodate young homeless people raises safeguarding concerns due to the vulnerability of this group (Homeless Link, 2011). In the North East, the use of B&B accommodation was most commonly described as '*rare*', with 4 out of 7 of local authorities (57%) giving this response and 14% (one out of 7 local authorities) reporting that it is '*never*' used. Nearly a third (2 out of 7 or 29%) reported that it is used '*sometimes*'.

### ***Move On from Temporary Accommodation***

Local authorities taking part in the survey were asked about provisions for move on from temporary accommodation. 6 out of 7 respondents (86%) reported that their local authority works with private landlords who are willing to offer tenancies to young people and 6 out of 7 local authorities (86%) have a cashless bond or rent deposit scheme which young people can access. Less than half, however, (3 out of 7 or 43%) have developed shared accommodation options for young people and only 2 out of 7 (29%) have a social lettings agency.

### **Service Gaps**

#### ***Emergency Accommodation***

A number of providers expressed concern that overall, there remains a lack of emergency accommodation within their local authority area for young people to access at short notice:

*'There are no emergency bed spaces for young people' (Provider)*

*'There is clearly not enough supported accommodation services available so B&B are still being use' (Provider)*

Two local authority respondents also reported this to be an issue within their local authorities due to the size and rural nature of the areas:

*'There continues to be insufficient provision of accommodation for homeless young people...given the size and rural nature of the county' (Local authority respondent)*

*'There does not appear to be enough suitable, affordable accommodation in [the city] and rural areas, including a lack of emergency accommodation which can be accessed at short notice especially for vulnerable females (Local authority respondent)*

#### ***Move On to the Private Rented Sector***

In light of limited social housing stock and changes to the welfare system, young people are going to become increasingly reliant on private rented sector tenancies. Local authorities, however, expressed concern about a '*general unwillingness*' of private landlords to house otherwise homeless young people, reinforced by the reduction in the amount of LHA that is available to young people and proposals to further cut housing benefit to people under the age of 25. One local authority respondent reported:

*'The reduction in LHA rate undermines the LA and other agencies' attempts to move on young people into the private sector from homelessness or supported housing / hostel, putting increasing pressure on already reduced social sector stock. The proposed withdrawal of housing benefit for young people under the age of 25 will severely circumscribe our ability to provide accommodation solutions' (Local authority respondent)*

Similarly, providers expressed concern about the impact of welfare reforms on the move on options available to young people:

*'Very limited housing options for under 25s becoming more scarce as private landlords show marked preference for 25 - 34 year old tenants in shared accommodation' (Provider)*

*'Youth unemployment and changes to the benefit system have a negative impact on the prospects for young people' (Provider)*

*'The repercussions of changes to LHA and the problems it will cause for young people is starting to come through' (Provider)*

This reflects the findings of Homeless Link's Survey of Needs and Provision 2012, where move on accommodation was reported to be the biggest gap in service provision nationally (Homeless Link, 2012). Recent research by Northumbria University also found that a lack of move on accommodation was resulting in many service users remaining in expensive supported accommodation for significantly longer periods than necessary and projects being unable to accept new clients. The research also highlighted mixed feelings from providers regarding the suitability of the private rented sector as a supplier of move-on accommodation due to concerns over rent affordability, property conditions and security of tenure. Many service users also expressed grave concern about entering the sector, with many already having had negative experiences (Harding et al., 2012).

### ***Lack of Accommodation for Young People with Complex Needs***

Local authorities reported finding suitable emergency, supported and move on accommodation for young people with complex needs to be problematic:

*'There is a gap for supported accommodation aimed at younger clients with complex needs that have been evicted from other housing providers' (Local authority respondent)*

*'There are issues with finding and maintaining accommodation for people with very chaotic, challenging and violent behaviour outside the "normal" range' (Local authority respondent)*

*'Lack of emergency accommodation for complex needs young people' (Local authority respondent)*

*'Require accommodation that is dedicated more to young people with complex needs and additional youth work facilities' (Local authority respondent)*

*'Intensive support needs are poorly catered for in most authorities' (Local authority respondent)*

*'There is a gap for supported accommodation aimed at younger clients with complex needs that have been evicted from other housing providers' (Local authority respondent)*

These concerns were echoed by providers:

*'The main issue I find is the provision for accommodation for those aged 21-25 who often have complex needs' (Provider)*

*'Provision for older young people who often have complex needs. Many are "known" locally and so are often turned away from accommodation leading to them remaining as street homeless' (Provider)*

*'[We need more] provision for the hardest to help young people who move around due to their behaviour. We are working closely with colleagues in YOT and leaving care services to continue to provide the quality services these young people need' (Provider)*

*'Lack of longer term support providers for 16/17 year olds who are not suitable / able to access hostel accommodation' (Provider)*

The difficulties of supporting clients with complex needs were recently highlighted by broader research looking at homelessness in the North East across all age groups. Although the eventual financial savings which result from meeting needs effectively are substantial, working with homeless people with complex needs is difficult and expensive. The research found that faced with a target culture and payment by results, some service providers 'cherry pick' clients with less complex needs, turn people with complex needs away or only accept a small number of such clients at any one time. Concerns were also expressed that not all agencies working with homeless people with complex needs are appropriately trained and some may be duplicating each other's services. It was felt that commissioning practices and services should be changed to better reflect the difficulties of working with the client group (Irving, 2012).

### ***Mentoring / Peer Support***

A further service gap identified by providers was mentoring/peer-led support services for young people, particularly for those with behavioural problems. A recent piece of local research which asked homeless service users about the types of support which are most useful to them highlighted the importance and benefits of peer-led services and engagement in social activities for service users. Benefits included: improvements in confidence and self esteem and providing service users with a sense of structure in their lives (Harding et al, 2012).

### **Good Practice**

#### ***Homelessness 'Gateways'***

Several local authorities have developed 'Gateways' or 'Pathways' systems to improve the co-ordination of homelessness services across local authority areas and the case management of homeless service users. Previous research has identified Newcastle City Council's 'Gateway' and Darlington Borough Council's 'Key Point of Access' (KPA) system as best practice examples of this (Irving, 2012). These systems control access to supported housing, providing a rounded view of client needs and facilitate a shared understanding of how services can best work together to meet those needs. The value of this approach was highlighted once again by one local authority respondent who commented:

*'We have developed a single access point to supported housing. Our Gateway prioritises client need and matches them with accommodation or support provision. The Gateway enables commissioning services such as Youth Offending, Leaving Care, Mental Health etc to record their clients via the web based system and have them matched. The aim is to reduce duplication and promote stability by making the right placement with the right*

*level of support and to the person most in need across the services' (Local authority respondent)*

In light of funding shortages and resource constraints, the greater co-ordination of local authority and voluntary sector led services is critical.

### **Prevention Services**

The greater emphasis on prevention in the sector in recent years is a highly positive development. Although research on the effectiveness of prevention is limited, it is reasonable to assume that effective prevention services could result in significant financial savings to public expenditure in the long term, as well as significant social benefits for young people. Respondents cited a range of effective approaches to prevention in operation in the North East. Responses included: dedicated young people's homelessness prevention teams, joint protocols and family mediation services:

*'Young persons homeless prevention service' (Local authority respondent)*

*'Joint protocol multi agency involvement' (Local authority respondent)*

*'We have been working on an early intervention model to provide longer term family support rather than just mediation with young people who have relationship issues with parents. This is likely to lead to a change in the way we work with families in our homeless prevention service when the pilot is evaluated' (Provider)*

*'We have a specific young person's service which is aimed at achieving the best possible outcome for the client and avoiding crisis. We also have developed a package of options for people to overcome difficulties in access to suitable accommodation. We have an allocations policy that does not exclude young people. Our support services have the ability to enable priority for people facing potential crisis. We provide assistance for those people who are ready for move on from supported accommodation and have created additional priority routes into independent accommodation. We also have access to furniture packs and ongoing support, as well as a rent guarantee deposit scheme. We believe the best option for prevention is to quantify the barrier and develop an appropriate solution' (Local authority respondent)*

*'Working closely with Children's Services to accurately assess presenting young people and tailor the solution' (Local authority respondent)*

*'[We] see the value of preventative services and we have good joined up working arrangements and early intervention in terms of family support for those who would become youth homeless, so we expect to see a continued decline as these services provide good outcomes for young people' (Local authority respondent)*

*'Young Person's Housing Co-ordinator and Gateway Panel. The service has provided invaluable information on the scale of the issue, with drill down data and has helped to relieve the problem. Family Mediation is excellent for prevention' (Local authority respondent)*

*'The prevention team have worked with a number of agencies to resolve housing issues such as Night Stop, Unite mediation and referrals into*

*supported housing schemes or floating support. A home visit is also completed for every young person asked to leave care to try and progress housing within a planned process rather than crisis intervention'*

*'I would recommend family mediation and floating support to be used in conjunction with any tenancies issued to young people as good support and overcoming isolation can be critical to maintaining tenancies and wellbeing'  
(Local authority respondent)*



## CONCLUSION

This survey is part of a broader programme of work being undertaken by Youth Homeless North East to help local authorities and service providers to prevent youth homelessness and to ensure that appropriate services are available to respond to the needs of young people who do become homeless. A 'Youth Housing Charter' – expressing the housing experiences, needs and aspirations of young homeless people – and a 'Regional Youth Housing Strategy' – outlining plans to address young people's housing needs through a coherent approach – are currently being finalised. It is hoped that this survey will further support the content and impact of the charter and strategy.

The survey results indicate that young people in the North East are increasingly falling victim to homelessness, with little recourse to income or accommodation, while local authorities and service providers are working hard to support young people, but within a context of dwindling resources. What's more, the challenge of youth homelessness for the North East is likely to be exacerbated in the coming years by continued economic fragility within the region, future public spending cuts and the implementation of welfare reforms. Both local authority respondents and service providers fear that the full effects of public sector funding cuts and welfare reform are yet to be felt:

*'The repercussions of changes to [local housing allowance] and the problems it will cause for young people are starting to come through' (Provider)*

*'The biggest issue in the North East will be local approaches to reducing [Supporting People] funding' (Provider)*

In this context, it is essential that local authorities and voluntary sector organisations work collectively and creatively to maximise resources to tackle youth homelessness.

The picture of youth homelessness in the North East is not unique. Indeed, it broadly reflects that found at the national level. Accordingly, the recommendations of Homeless Link outlined in '*Young and Homeless*' apply equally to this report. But, it is advised, in particular, that local authorities and service providers embraced the following policies, principles and practices:

### ***Understanding and Protecting 'What Works'***

Understanding 'what works' is critical to improving outcomes for young homeless people and ensuring that resources are maximised. Local authorities and providers should ensure that they have a true understanding of the scale and causes of homelessness in their area, have effective systems in place for the monitoring of outcomes and evaluation of services and are aware of the points at which people fall out of support or fail to engage with services and how these issues can be overcome. Effective services and good practice should also be protected. The homeless sector has made significant strides forward in the past decade – facilitated by the Supporting People programme – and it is important that positive developments made are not lost at a time of challenge.

### ***Maintaining a Focus on Prevention***

There are pockets of best practice in relation to prevention in evidence across the North East – particularly in relation to services for young people – which have resulted in a greater understanding of the causes of homelessness and stronger partnership working to prevent homelessness. Good practice approaches include:

- Identifying families and young people at risk of homelessness early and targeting services accordingly.
- Developing 'Team around the family' and 'Team around the child' approaches across the region to support early identification of those at greatest risk.
- Delivering 'early intervention and prevention' consistently across the region.
- Implementing use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to identify early those at risk, carry out an assessment of need and coordinate a response.
- Developing 'mediation' services across the region to provide support to young people, parents and carers in resolving conflict.
- Providing specialist support to respond to specific needs including support to parents and carers of young people.
- Developing 'education' on homelessness and related issues to be delivered in schools, colleges, youth clubs, remand centres, prisons and to 'looked-after' children and young people; including mentoring and peer education initiatives.

Yet, during hard economic times, it can be difficult to continue funding for essential preventative services and the value of these services is inherently difficult to evidence. It is recommended, however, that all local authorities adopt the approaches identified above; that further research into effective approaches to prevention is undertaken; and good practice in the area of prevention is more widely disseminated.

### ***Strategic Commitment to Supporting Young Homeless People***

Local authorities and providers should continue to work with infrastructure bodies such as Homeless Link and Youth Homeless North East to develop co-ordinated responses to youth homelessness.

Every local authority should have a specific section of their homelessness strategy dedicated to youth homelessness to ensure that appropriate accommodation and support services are commissioned to meet the needs of young homeless people. Maintaining an adequate level of funding for young people's homelessness services is essential to prevent episodes of homelessness turning into lifetimes of exclusion.

Local authority housing and children services' departments also need to work together more effectively. All local authorities should have a formal joint protocol towards young people in place and have developed appropriate supporting working practices. In the current financial climate it is an economic imperative to work jointly to address youth homelessness in order to maximise the impact of resources.

### ***Adapting to Change and Seizing Opportunities***

The removal of the SP ring-fence and relocation of SP teams within new departments following local authority restructuring offers an opportunity for commissioners and providers to secure additional funding for homelessness services, by promoting the added value of homelessness services to other sectors.

Adapting to new commissioning structures including joint-commissioning and personalisation may also enable valuable services to survive. It is important that providers develop infrastructures which enable them to bid for jointly-commissioned contracts and that services know how to lead on good practice around personalised support. Improved infrastructure regarding tendering would also be useful for taking advantage of pilot monies and grants which become available.

Across the sector, voluntary organisations should seek to further develop positive working relationships and to utilise these for strategic purposes. Organisations

should seek to be more pro-active in developing individual and collective strategies for dealing with efficiencies and cuts, such as influencing local policy and pooling resources in order to maintain services.

### ***Supporting Young Clients with Complex Needs***

Supporting young people with complex needs to make a successful transition into adulthood and independent living is a key issue within the sector. Young homeless people with complex needs should be given greater priority and new models of service commissioning and working with this client group should be developed. Potential options may include: commissioners paying premiums for young people with higher needs; adjusting targets for providers working with young people with complex needs; the greater use of a Housing First approach with the client group; and, the greater use of multi-agency case management meetings regarding young homeless people with complex needs.

### ***Emergency Accommodation***

Every local authority must provide access to suitable emergency accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness. B&B accommodation is not a suitable place for young people to be placed, even in an emergency. Local authorities should prioritise alternative solutions to B&Bs, such as nightstops and crash pads.

### ***Helping Service Users Access and Sustain Accommodation***

A range of suitable, affordable and appropriate accommodation for all young people must be developed. Across the sector, there are various examples of good and innovative practice in operation to help service users access and sustain decent and affordable private rental accommodation. These include: organisations developing trustful relationships with a small number of private landlords; agreeing to manage tenancies on behalf of landlords; guaranteeing minimum levels of ongoing support to service users; providing service users with establishment packages (such as furniture); landlord accreditation schemes; and, rent deposit and rent guarantee schemes. Yet, more could be done, particularly in relation to broadening the scope and reach of rent deposit schemes and partnership working with landlords. There is also much greater scope for the sharing of good practice across authorities and encouraging shared and common approaches to improving management in the sector and driving up physical standards.

### ***Addressing Financial Exclusion***

Helping service users to access and sustain employment should also be a key priority for the North East; although the difficulty of this is recognised in light of the limited number of jobs available. The value of education, training and employment schemes in supporting service users to reach and sustain independence should be protected and strengthened. Additional resources should be invested in exploring the reasons that people remain unemployed and reducing the barriers to employment.

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