

HOMELESS**WATCH**

YOUNG AND
HOMELESS 2013



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YOUNG AND HOMELESS 2013

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PRODUCED BY

Policy Team

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KEY FINDINGS

Homelessness continues to be a significant problem for young people in England in 2013. Many young people under 25 years old in England are homeless or at high risk of homelessness, and many more are 'hidden homeless' who stay in insecure or unsafe housing. Homelessness is a disruptive and often frightening experience for young people in particular, who are on the point of making the transition to adulthood and a disruptive transition can lead to greater challenges later in life.

Homeless Link carried out this research to find out more about the scale and nature of homelessness amongst young people in England. It also explores the support available to help prevent homelessness and, when it cannot be avoided, to achieve positive outcomes in their lives. Our research is based on a survey of homelessness organisations and local authorities carried out in October 2013. We also interviewed young homeless people and staff at homelessness providers.

Our key findings include:

- The main cause of homelessness amongst young people is that their parents are no longer willing to house them, with the main driver being the irretrievable breakdown in that relationship. Nearly half of young homeless people become homeless for this reason.
- Around half of young homeless people are not in education, employment or training (NEET) at the point of becoming homeless and many also lack independent living skills. This may be due to a disrupted education or difficult childhood experiences that also contributed to them becoming homeless.
- Around a quarter of local authorities and two-thirds of homelessness agencies reported that young people's needs were more complex than last year. This is particularly concerning, given the downward pressures on local authority budgets to meet the needs of vulnerable people.
- An increasing number of homelessness agencies report that they are sometimes unable to offer support to young people who come to them for help: 6 in 10 agencies said they were unable to provide support in the last month due to limited capacity.
- Local authorities prevented homelessness for around a fifth of the young people approaching them for help. Homelessness was more commonly prevented amongst younger homeless people, aged under 18. There were some signs of better joint working between Children's Services and Housing Departments to support homeless 16- and 17-year olds.
- Local authorities reported that the most widely available emergency provision were No Second Night Out (NSNO) accommodation and supported lodgings, with around half of local authorities having these in place. NSNO, however, is not necessarily appropriate for vulnerable young people, and this needs further monitoring. In some areas, B&Bs – which are unsuitable – were often used to accommodate young people in an emergency.
- For young people who cannot return home, there is increasingly less social housing available. The option of shared accommodation in the private rented sector is an increasingly common move-on option – the second most common option for young people leaving supported accommodation such as hostels and foyers. It is, however,

becoming more inaccessible, due to changes to welfare entitlement, with very limited affordability and availability in some areas.

- A range of welfare reforms are having a negative impact on young homeless people in particular, including the Shared Accommodation Rate limiting access to suitable private housing, as well as benefit sanctions.

INTRODUCTION

Youth homelessness is a continuing issue in England. Many young people aged under-25 get support from homelessness services, and many others stay temporarily with friends and family or sleep rough. This report focuses on young single people, and some young parents, who receive support from local authorities or homelessness agencies.

Without adequate support, homelessness can significantly affect these young people's lives. Young homeless people are more likely to become homeless again when they are older¹, and also face greater difficulties finding work as homelessness can disrupt their engagement in education, training and employment.² Preventing youth homelessness is key and there is an increasing recognition that young people who are supported to remain with their immediate family, or other family members, have better outcomes than those young people who end up homeless. For many young people the response they need is some time and space away from immediate family pressures and then advice and mediation support to encourage a planned return.

The high number of young people not in education, training or employment, slow economic growth, a lack of affordable accommodation, wide-ranging changes to the welfare system and cuts in public spending on youth services are all putting additional pressures on families and young people and the available opportunities for housing and employment. The unemployment rate for young people is close to the highest level it has been for the past 20 years, and is two and half times the rate for the total population.³ Finding work is particularly challenging for young homeless people with limited education and training and no previous experience of employment.

The supply of affordable housing is having an impact on young people in housing need and those who are homeless. Some young people are having to stay in supported accommodation services for longer than they need because limited affordable move-on accommodation is available. The University of Cambridge estimated that around 9,000 young people living in hostels at December 2012 were no longer in need of support and were ready to move-on.⁴ One-bed accommodation in social housing, that is available to let to young people, is increasingly scarce due to the impact of under-occupation penalties. The private rented sector is becoming increasingly unaffordable for young people in some areas as rents rise higher than wages and benefits.⁵

Contributing to the housing situation are some of the Government's recent welfare reforms, particularly the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate to people under 35. With

¹ Research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that 34% of homeless people with the most complex problems had run away from home at least one night when they were young, while 16% had been part of a family that had experienced homelessness or spend time in local authority care: McDonagh, T., 'Tackling homelessness and exclusion: Understanding complex lives', Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2011):

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/homelessness-exclusion-services-summary.pdf>

² Copps, J. and Keen, S., 'Getting back on track: helping young people not in education, employment or training in England', New Philanthropy Capital (2009): <http://www.depauluk.org/uploads/documents/getting-back-on-track-npc-report-on-neets.pdf>

³ The unemployment rate for 18-24 year olds was 18.0% in the three months to November 2013, which is slightly down from a peak of 20% reported in the three months to December 2011.

⁴ Burgess and Clarke, 'Mapping the number of extra housing units needed for young people' Centre for Housing & Planning, University of Cambridge (2012), for Centrepoint:

⁵ For example, median gross weekly earnings in London increased by 0.9% in the year to April 2013, while median private rental sector rents in London rose by 13% over broadly the same period. For data on wages see Office for National Statistics website here: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ashes/annual-survey-of-hours-and-earnings/2013-provisional-results/index.html>. See Valuation Office Agency's website for data on rents: http://www.voa.gov.uk/corporate/statisticalReleases/120531_PrivateResidentialRentalMarketStatistics.html.

single people between 25 and 34 who claim Housing Benefit also trying to find shared accommodation, more people are competing for shared properties: our recent research on the affordability of shared properties in London indicates that only 5% were affordable for people on the Shared Accommodation Rate.⁶

Under intense financial pressure themselves, many local authorities have reduced the funding available for housing-related support, resulting in many supported accommodation and floating support services reducing the level of support they provide.

Taking these pressures into account, this third annual report examines trends in youth homelessness and explores the main issues that young homeless people are facing. As in our previous *Young & Homeless* reports, our research is based on a survey of both homelessness organisations and local authorities.⁷ This year we also conducted interviews with young homeless people and staff at homelessness services.⁸

⁶ Homeless Link (2013), *Nowhere to Move* http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attached-downloads/No%20Where%20To%20Move_FINAL.pdf

⁷ 79 homelessness agencies and 90 local authorities responded to our surveys.

⁸ 12 young people who had experienced homelessness and 3 staff at homelessness organisations were interviewed as part of the research.

HOW MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS?

The number of homeless people in England has been rising steadily since 2010. Over the past year, 53,590 households in England were accepted as being statutorily homeless – an increase of 2% on the previous year.⁹

The number of acceptances of homeless households that were headed by young people,¹⁰ however, fell by 10%, and only 1,620 were 16/17 year olds or care leavers under 21.¹¹ Many young people fall outside the definition of statutory homelessness, which mostly consists of families with children. Limited data are available on these young people (see Box A). There is, however, evidence that the number of young people sleeping rough has risen.¹²

Box A: What data are available on youth homelessness?

Limited data are available on the number of young people who are homeless in England. The main data available are on young people who are statutorily homeless and receive support from local authorities¹³, and those in services funded by housing-related support (formerly Supporting People).¹⁴ The housing-related support data, however, is now limited with around two-thirds of local authorities submitting data to St Andrews University's Centre for Housing Research. Data are also available on young people who are homeless immediately prior to accepting a social letting (CORE data).¹⁵ No available data capture the number who stay temporarily with friends or squat – often referred to as the 'hidden homeless' – and there is very limited data covering young rough sleepers, with age recorded only in London.

The findings from our survey reflect this complex picture, with varying estimates from local authorities of whether the numbers of young homeless people have gone up or down. The 90 local authorities in our survey reported 1,261 homeless presentations by young people in September 2013, and 83 reported giving advice or support to nearly 3,000 young people in the same month. Nearly half of homelessness agencies reported seeing more young people than last year, with only 9% reporting a decrease. The 79 agencies supported around 5,300 young people in September 2013.

With no clear evidence on whether the numbers are rising or falling, some of the following factors may be influencing local changes in youth homelessness:

⁹ Statutory acceptances rose from 52,710 in the year to September 2012 to 53,590 in the year to September 2013, an increase of 2%. *Statutory homelessness data, Department for Communities and Local Government, Table 770.*

¹⁰ This includes both young people with children and single young people that are accepted as statutorily homeless.

¹¹ Statutory acceptances where households were headed by a 16-24 year old fell from 17,370 between Q4 2011-Q3 2012 to 15,680 between Q4 2012-Q3 2013, a decrease of 10%. *Statutory homelessness data, Department for Communities and Local Government, Table 781.* 1,620 of the 53,590 households accepted as homeless between Q4 2012-Q3 2013 were 'young people', defined as 16- or 17-year olds or care leavers between 18 and 20 years old. *Ibid, Table 773.*

¹² 719 people aged 18-25 were seen rough sleeping in London in the year to March 2013, compared with 624 in the previous year. *CHAIN Rough Sleeping data, Broadway, Street to Home Report: <http://www.broadwaylondon.org/CHAIN/Reports/StreettoHomeReports.html>*

¹³ The Department for Communities and Local Government publish these data and they are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>.

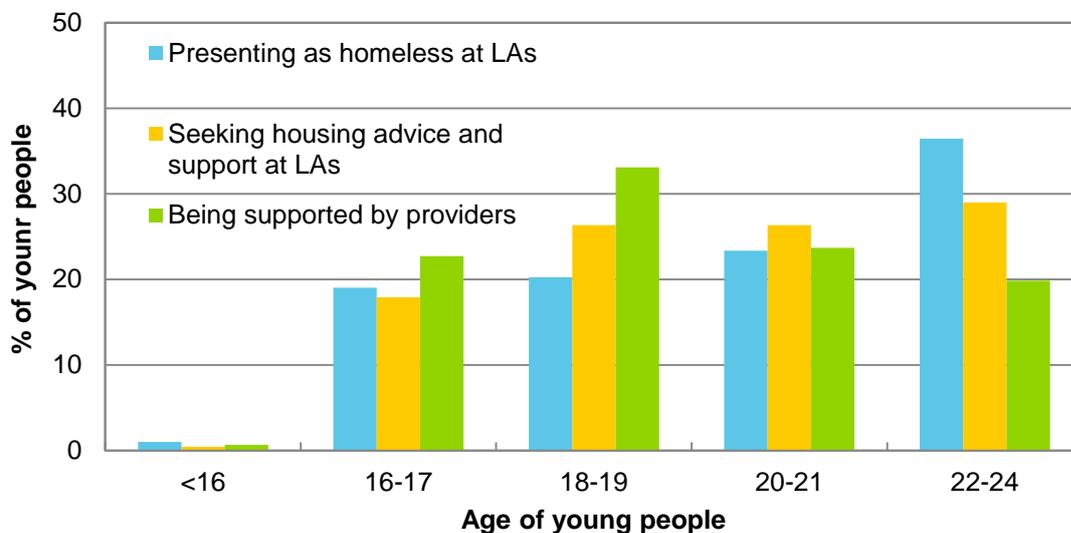
¹⁴ St. Andrew's University's Centre for Housing Research collate these data and they are available here: <https://supportingpeople.st-andrews.ac.uk/>.

¹⁵ Data on the Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales in Social Housing in England (CORE data) are available here: <https://core.communities.gov.uk/>.

- A more focused approach to preventing youth homelessness, such as education work in schools and use of family mediation, is likely to be having an impact in some local authority areas.
- Signs of improvements in joint working between some Children’s Services and Housing departments may be leading to fewer 16- and 17-year olds being picked up under housing duties.
- The numbers reported in the survey show only those approaching local authorities for help, so stricter gatekeeping or reduced services may be leading to lower reporting.
- The ongoing reduction in the number of supported accommodation services in England¹⁶ may result in the remaining services that are still open supporting more young homeless people, while in total, fewer young people may be receiving support.

Young people presenting as homeless at local authorities tend to be older, as many will be young parents applying as homeless as a family. In September 2013, the average age of young people presenting as homeless was 20-21 years old (Graph 1).¹⁷ This was higher than the average of 19-20 years old for those seeking housing advice and support from local authorities and those being supported by homelessness service providers, who are more likely to be single people.

Graph 1: Ages of young people presenting at local authorities and using homelessness services



Source: Homeless Link’s youth homelessness survey 2013; Providers: N = 79; Presenting as homeless at local authorities: N = 90; Seeking housing advice: N = 83.

Fewer 16-17 years olds presented as homeless at local authorities when compared to those using services at homelessness organisations, perhaps reflecting that those approaching

¹⁶ Homeless Link (2013), *Survey of Needs and Provision 2013*:

http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/SNAP%202013%20Final%20180413_2.pdf

¹⁷ Calculated as the weighted average age based on the number of young people from each age bracket using services multiplied by the average age in each bracket; for example, the average age in the 22-24 year old age bracket is 23 years old.

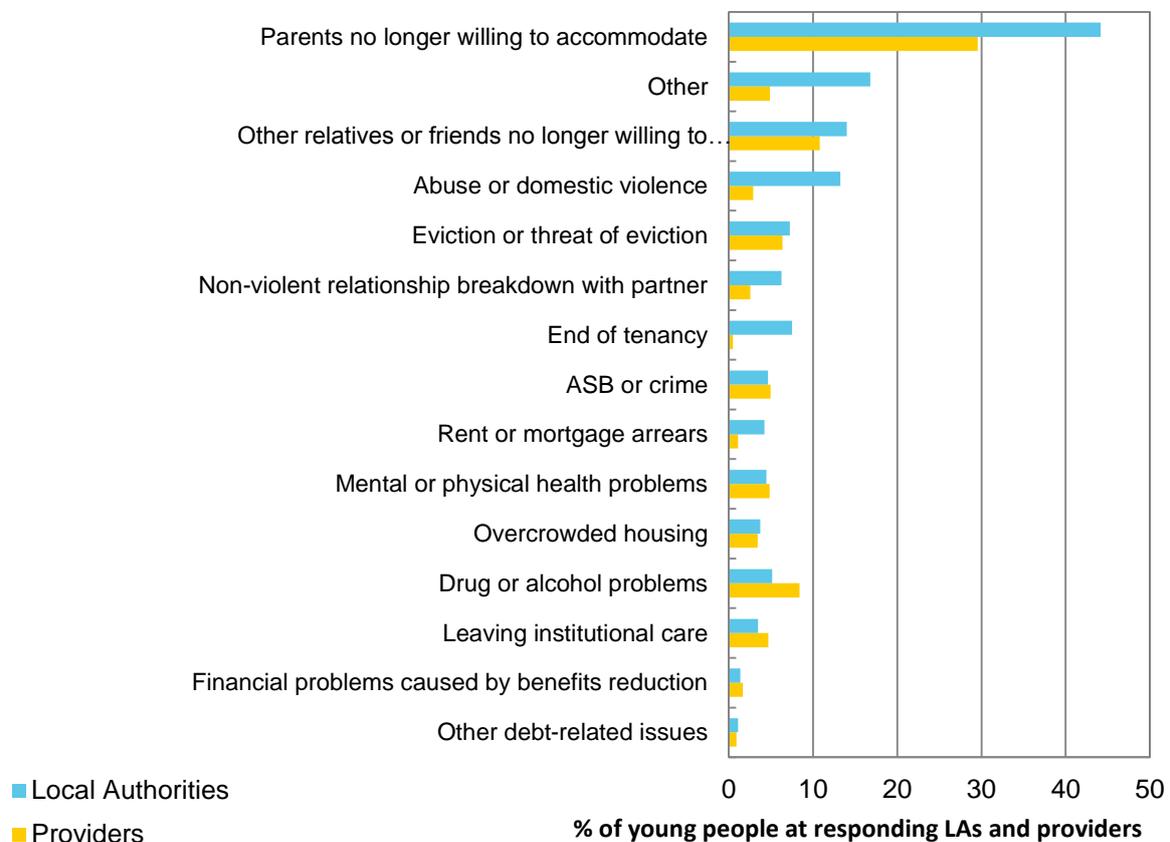
local authorities are offered support by Children's Services departments rather than Housing. Very few young people aged under 16 approached local authorities and homelessness service providers in September 2013.

WHY ARE YOUNG PEOPLE BECOMING HOMELESS?

People can become homeless for a wide and complex range of reasons. For some, traumatic early experiences, unstable relationships, mental health or substance use issues can lead to homelessness. Others can suddenly find themselves homeless when a relationship breaks down or they lose their tenancy unexpectedly. In addition, there are a range of structural factors that can lead to homelessness including unemployment, poverty, the shortage of housing and high accommodation costs.

The main reason that young people report not being able to live in their permanent home is because their parents are no longer willing to house them. Nearly half (44%) of young people approaching local authorities and nearly a third (30%) of young people at homelessness agencies became homeless for this primary reason (Graph 2).

Graph 2: Why are young people becoming homeless?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013: Providers: N=75; Local authorities: N=81

Family breakdown was the main driver of this cause of homelessness. 53 of 67 homelessness providers and 50 of 70 local authorities ranked this as one of the two main reasons for why families were unwilling to accommodate the young person (Table 1). The breakdown in relationship with a step-parent was also a major driver.

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

No. of respondents

	Ranked as top 2 by:		Ranked as bottom 2 by:	
	LAs	Providers	LAs	Providers
Irretrievable breakdown in relationship with parent	50	53	1	0
Irretrievable breakdown in relationship with step-parent	28	34	11	12
Financial reasons	13	5	18	26
Overcrowding	15	13	23	25
Violence/abuse	4	6	20	24
Other	5	4	11	13

Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; Providers N=67; Local authorities: N=70

Financial reasons and overcrowding also contributed to parents being unable to accommodate young people, with a possible factor being the weak economic environment in which unemployed young people are less able to contribute to family income. Recent welfare reforms, such as non-dependant deductions¹⁸ and changes to Council Tax benefit, may also be having an effect: research commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found 2.4 million low-income families will pay on average £138 more in council tax in the year to March 2014.¹⁹

Other reasons for youth homelessness include friends or relatives no longer willing to accommodate; domestic violence or abuse; and evictions or end of tenancy. Some agencies described that young people may not understand the realities of homelessness when they come to leave home.

The proportion of young people becoming homeless for the reasons above are broadly similar to those reported in our 2012 survey. The one exception is an apparent fall reported by homelessness organisations in the proportion of young people becoming homeless because of drug and alcohol problems. This contributed to 8% of young people at homelessness organisations in September 2013, compared to 18% in 2012.

With complex relationships and difficult family circumstances involved, it may not always be clear to local authorities or agencies why a young person becomes homeless. For some, this may be because the young person was unwilling to discuss why their relationship broke down with their family. One young person told us:

“[The previous service that I used] didn’t know much about the real reason why I moved out. I was trying to forget about it myself.”

Interview with young homeless person, homelessness agency

¹⁸ Non-dependant deductions reduce the amount of Housing Benefit that a household with non-dependants receives as they are seen to be able to support themselves. At present, the deductions only apply to people aged 25 or above, and people aged under 25 and in work.

¹⁹ Bushe, S., Kenway, P. and Aldridge, H., ‘*The Impact of Localising Council Tax Benefit*’, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013)

Sarah's story²⁰

Sarah is 18. She lived with her parents until she was 11, when they split up and she stayed with her father. When he became ill, she helped care for him, missing school as she needed to look after him. When her father passed away, Sarah went to live with her mother, but the relationship didn't last long until she kicked Sarah out. She first slept at friends' houses or "anywhere she could stay", and has now been living in hostel accommodation for a year and a half.

Since moving into the hostel, staff have supported Sarah to access counselling and training, and she says she now has a better relationship with her mother. Sarah had not attended school regularly, but now feels confident applying for training courses and bursaries as she has the support of the hostel staff. She is now at college, and feels she is ready to move on with her life and get a flat of her own.

²⁰ Case study is from interviews conducted as part of the research. The interviewee's name has been changed to maintain anonymity.

WHO IS BECOMING HOMELESS?

Homelessness can happen to anyone, particularly for young people where family breakdown is a major cause. Some groups of young people, however, are more likely to experience homelessness than others.

A disproportionate number of homeless young people are **care leavers**, though the proportion varies between homelessness agencies and local authorities. 19% of young people at homelessness agencies were care leavers, up from 15% last year, whilst care leavers made up 4% of young people presenting as homeless at local authorities, compared with the 6% reported in last year's survey. These results highlight the continued challenges young people can experience when leaving care.

Young people who have a history of **offending** can also have housing or other difficulties when leaving custody, such as losing accommodation whilst in prison, family breakdown, limited or disrupted education, and difficulty finding work with a criminal record. A substantial proportion of young homeless people have been in the criminal justice system: homelessness agencies reported that a fifth of their clients in September 2013 were ex-offenders, while 4% presenting as homeless at local authorities had offending histories.²¹

Some homelessness agencies, particularly in London and the South East, saw homeless **asylum seekers and young refugees** in September 2013, although they made up only 4% of all young people using surveyed services. Some agencies reported that nearly 20% of their clients were young refugees and asylum seekers. Only four local authorities reported that a young refugee or asylum seeker had presented as homeless. This low number could be partly because some unaccompanied minors may be taken into the care of social services.

Young homeless people often have specific support needs relating to past experiences, the causes of them becoming homeless, or due to other disruption in their lives.

The main support needs of young people this year, as last year, continued to be that they were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and that they lacked independent living skills. These were the highest support needs reported by both local authorities and homelessness organisations, with the proportion with these support needs ranging from 37% to 54% (Graph 3), and may reflect the current economic environment with youth unemployment close to its highest level for the past 20 years. Staff at homelessness agencies commented that some young people "*do not have the skills to get a job and maintain it*" and others explained that many young people lack budgeting skills. Substance misuse and mental health issues also affected around 1 in 5 young homeless people (ranging from 19% to 26%).

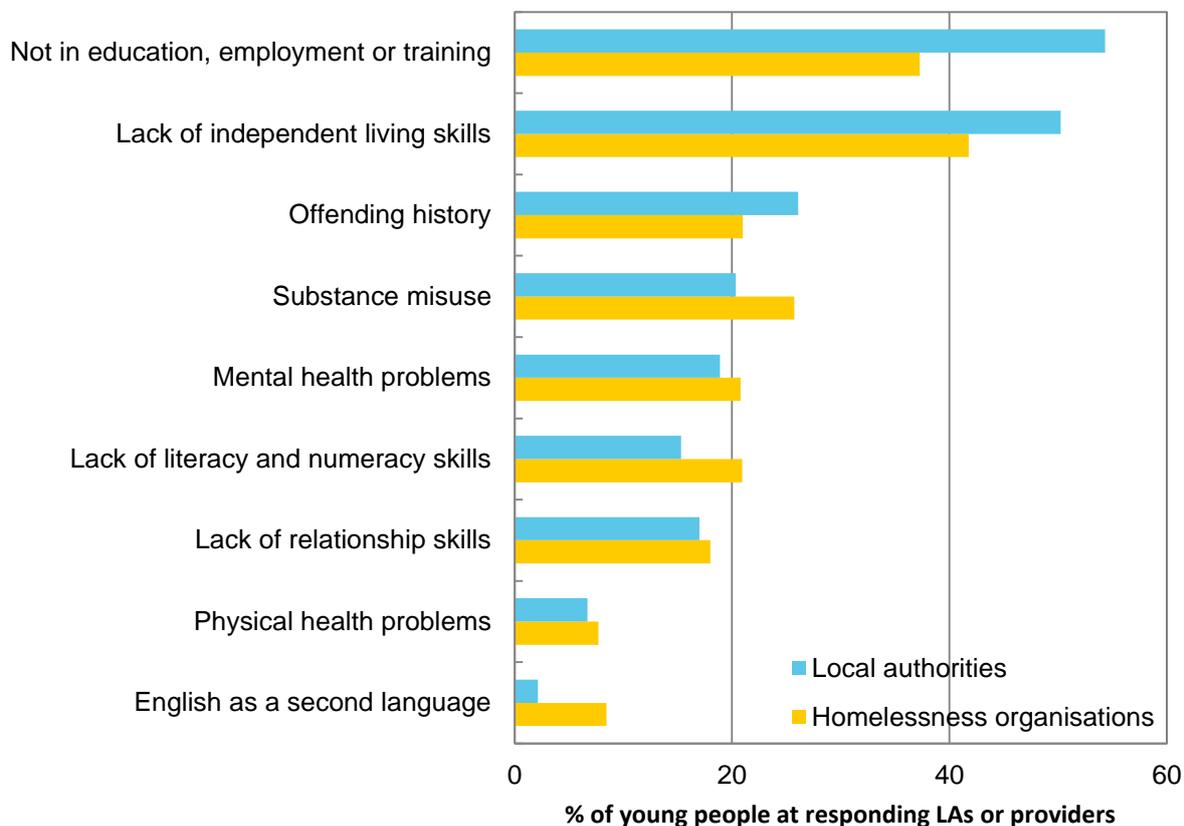
Young homeless people often experienced disrupted education or poor attendance at school. One young person who was excluded from school described how she found school "*difficult*" after her father passed away. 1 in 5 (21%) young people supported by homelessness agencies and 15% of those seen by local authorities had poor literacy or numeracy skills.

Young homeless people's support needs appear to be becoming more complex. Around a quarter of local authorities and two-thirds of homelessness agencies reported that young people's needs were more complex than last year, and only a few respondents reported less complexity (Graph 4). This seems to be a continued trend from last year, with around a

²¹ Comparative data were not collected in 2012.

quarter of local authorities reporting more complexity.²² The increasing complexity of young people’s support needs seems to be part of a wider trend across the homelessness population. Homeless Link’s *Survey of Needs and Provision 2013* found that the support needs of homeless people of all ages were becoming more complex.²³

Graph 3: Young homeless people’s support needs



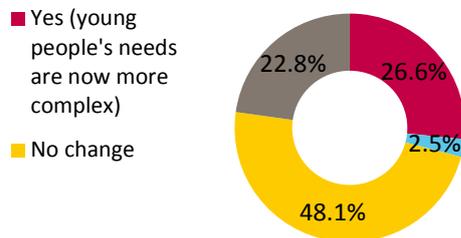
Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; Local authorities: N=63; Homelessness organisations: N=72

²² Homelessness organisations were not asked this question in last year’s survey.

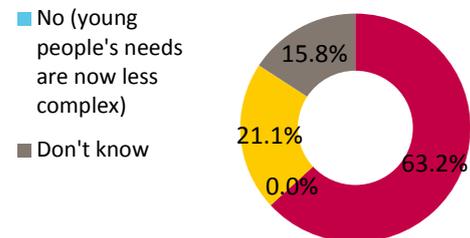
²³ Homeless Link (2013), *Survey of Needs and Provision 2013*: http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/SNAP%202013%20Final%20180413_2.pdf

Graph 4: Are young homeless people's support needs becoming more complex?

Local authorities' responses



Homelessness organisations' responses



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; Local authorities: N=79; Homelessness organisations: N=76

Dan's story²⁴

When Dan was 16, there was a lot going on at home and, after a total breakdown in communication, he left. He was referred to the council by his social worker and placed in a B&B which he described as "a horrific experience". Dan was told by the local authority that he wasn't entitled to any help and should go back to his parents'. He recalled feeling very scared as he couldn't go home and was worried about the future.

Dan went on to an assessment centre where for three months he mixed with older homeless people, those with substance use issues, and people who were very anti-social. He then moved into a low-support hostel, where he felt isolated and began drinking heavily, describing it as the lowest point in his life. Eventually, Dan was taken to hospital by his keyworker where he was diagnosed with special needs, and was assigned a psychiatrist and a care co-ordinator. He moved into high-support accommodation where, with the support of his keyworker, began to address his underlying issues and turn his life around.

²⁴ Case study is from interviews conducted as part of the research. The interviewee's name has been changed to maintain anonymity.

ROUGH SLEEPING AMONGST YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE

Sleeping rough can be dangerous and damaging, particularly for young people, and many local authorities have focused on preventing rough sleeping over the past few years. As there is limited data on rough sleeping, reporting relies on young people accurately describing their experiences. Homelessness agencies report that some young rough sleepers may hide away somewhere they see as safer, making them hard for agencies to find. Others may choose high risk options such as staying with drug-dealers²⁵, rather than sleep rough, putting themselves at risk of exploitation.

11% of young people at 57 local authorities slept rough before presenting as homeless, as did 12% of young people using services at 75 homelessness agencies.

Other data indicate that the number of young people sleeping rough before getting support is rising. Rough sleeping data from CHAIN, covering London only, indicate that the number of young people aged 25 or under sleeping rough in London over the year to March 2013 was 14% higher than the previous year.²⁶ The rise in young people sleeping rough also appears part of a broader trend of increased rough sleeping: the number of rough sleepers of all ages throughout England also increased in recent years – 2,309 were counted in Autumn 2012, up 6% from 2011.²⁷

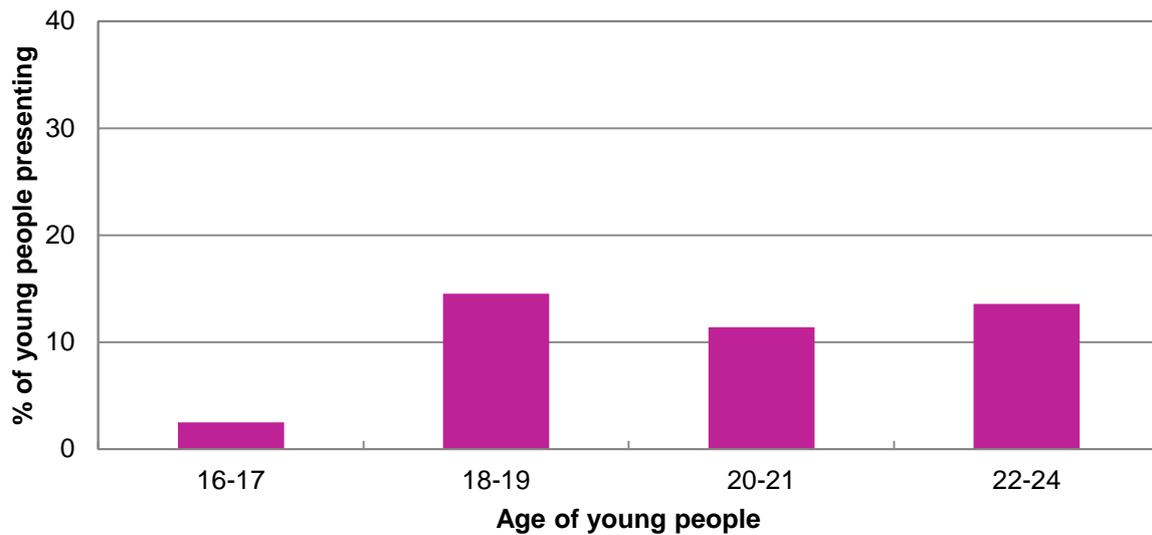
It is not clear from our survey whether rough sleeping is rising or falling amongst young homeless people. 18% of local authorities reported that more young homeless people had slept rough than last year, and 14% reported a decrease. Around half of homelessness agencies, however, reported an increase from last year compared to 13% that reported a fall. More generally, however, the number of young people coming to homelessness agencies who have slept rough at any point in time has increased compared with last year. Homelessness agencies reported that 17% of young people had ever slept rough, up from 10% last year.

²⁵ For example see: <http://www.centrepoin.org.uk/about-us/real-stories/life-stories/lucy>

²⁶ The latest rough sleeping statistics published by Broadway are available here: <http://www.broadwaylondon.org/CHAIN/Reports/StreettoHomeReports.html>

²⁷ See *Rough Sleeping in England: Autumn 2012*, Department for Communities and Local Government: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2012>

Graph 5: Ages of young people who slept rough before presenting as homeless at local authorities



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=57

Very few homeless 16- and 17-year olds (3%) had slept rough (Graph 5). This reflects improved emergency provision commissioned by local authorities for the youngest homeless people; one agency described having dedicated bed spaces for 16- and 17-year olds referred from the local authority.

The majority of young people who sleep rough do so for less than a week before approaching services. Three-quarters of young people at homelessness agencies, who had slept rough before approaching the service, slept rough for a week or less, with many (around 50% of all) sleeping rough for one or two days.

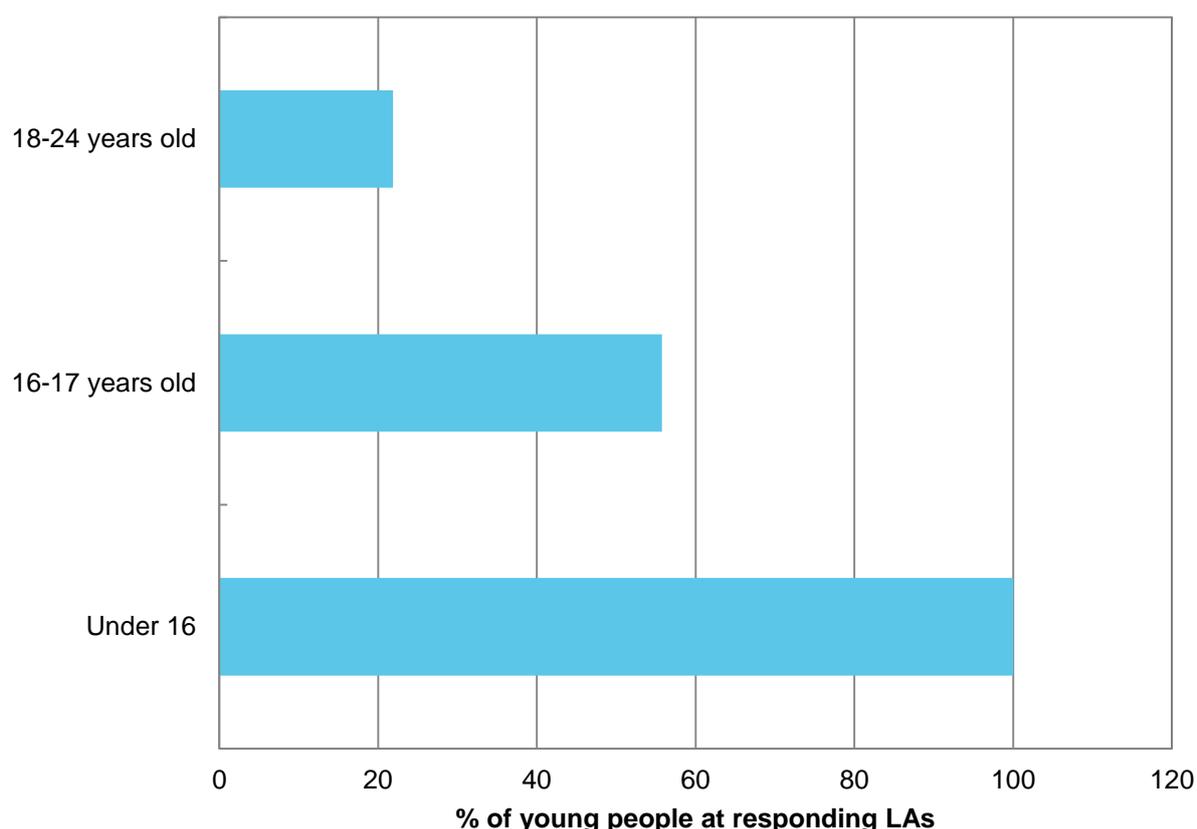
HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

Many local authorities provide services to help prevent young people from becoming homeless. These might include helping them to stay with their family through mediation, offering advice on different accommodation options, or providing suitable short-term housing whilst they find a more permanent solution.

Local authorities reported preventing homelessness for 22% of the young people aged 18-24 years old who approached them for help in September 2013, down from 46% in 2012 (Graph 6). The fall, however, may be due to differences in the sample of local authorities responding to our 2013 survey.

A higher proportion of young people aged under 18 were prevented from becoming homeless. Around half (56%) of the 16- and 17-year olds who presented as homeless at local authorities were prevented. All eight homelessness cases of children aged under 16 were prevented. The higher rate of prevention for young people aged under 18 is likely because of the additional role of Children's Services.

Graph 6: Age of young people who were prevented from becoming homeless



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=45

Homelessness prevention initiatives

Local authorities employ various prevention initiatives to help young people avoid homelessness. The most common were advice services, which 91% of local authorities provide (Table 2). Most local authorities also work in partnership with the Troubled Families programme – a central government initiative that funds local authorities to provide intensive

support to families. Two-thirds of local authorities carry out prevention work in schools, which can prepare young people about the realities of homelessness.

Table 2: Local authorities with prevention initiatives in their area

	Yes (%)
Are there advice services in your area for young people presenting as homeless?	91
Are you working in partnership with the local Troubled Families programme?	88
Do you have access to mediation services to support your prevention work?	74
Does home visiting routinely take place where appropriate?	72
Is education work in schools or other youth provision currently delivered in your area?	66

Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=80

Around three-quarters of local authorities operate mediation services, while 72% reported conducting routine home visits. With relationship breakdown with parents the leading cause of youth homelessness, these initiatives can be effective in helping young people return home which, provided it is safe, is recognised as the best option for promoting good outcomes for young people.

For some, however, a young person’s relationship with their family may not improve:

“I thought I would give my family another chance but then it got worse, then I moved out again.”

Interview with young homeless person, homelessness agency

In other cases, young people’s relationship with their families may be better when they are away from home:

“Now that I moved out, I get along better with my mum and my sisters. It’s just a nicer environment, really.”

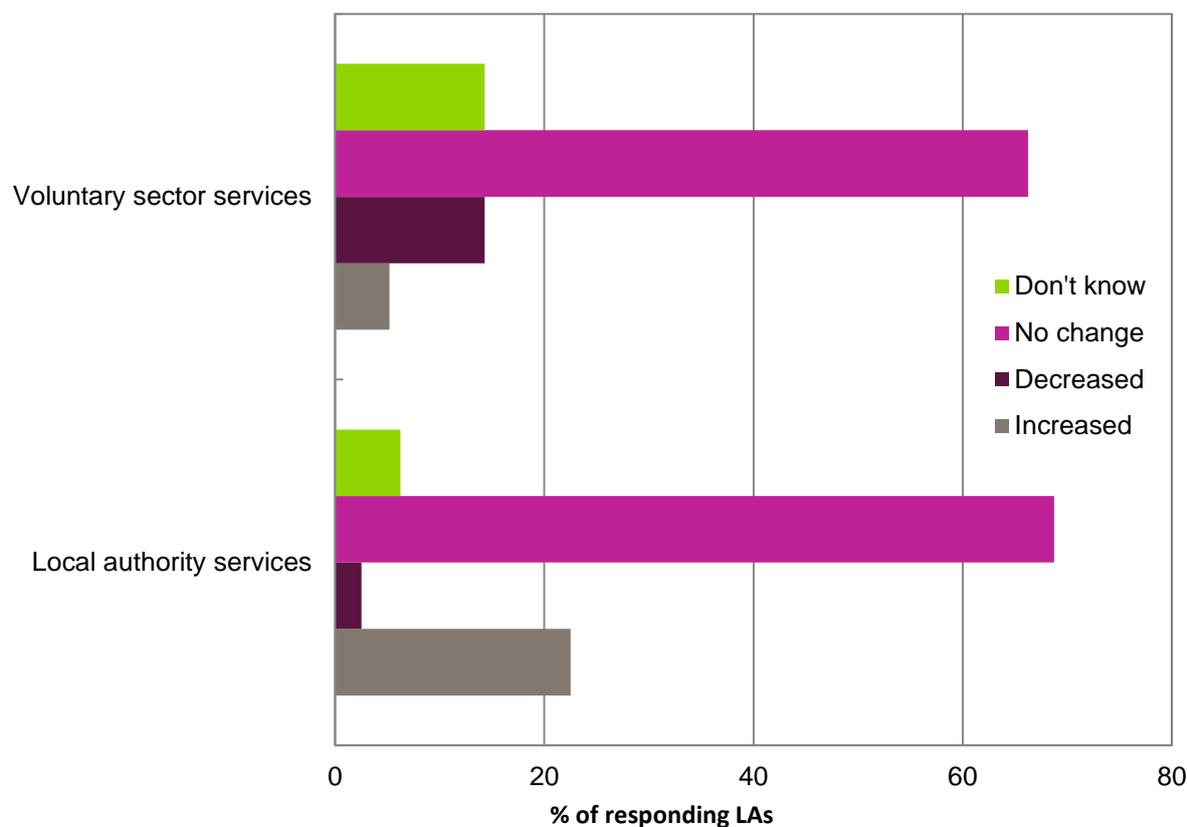
Interview with young homeless person, homelessness agency

Local authorities indicated that there have been some increases in the provision of prevention services by authorities, with most reporting that the number had increased or not changed from last year (Graph 7). 14% of local authorities, however, reported a decrease in prevention services provided by voluntary sector services. This fall may be related to continued funding reductions in homelessness agencies.²⁸

A third of local authorities, however, reported that there were not enough prevention services in their area, particularly in mediation and emergency accommodation. Some indicated that better education work could be done in schools, whilst other areas lacked services, including for young people with mental health issues and medium- to high-support needs.

²⁸ Homeless Link (2013), *Survey of Needs and Provision 2013*: http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/SNAP%202013%20Final%20180413_2.pdf

Graph 7: Changes to the availability of prevention services



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=72

An example of an effective model to help prevent youth homelessness is the Positive Pathway developed by St. Basils.²⁹ The Pathway provides a model of support to young people who are at risk of homelessness. It focusses on prevention but also offers tailored accommodation options and a supportive transition into adulthood to avoid the crisis of homelessness. The Pathway model has been implemented in several local authorities across England including Birmingham and Brighton & Hove.

Joint working between Children’s Services and Housing departments

Local authorities’ Children’s Services and Housing Departments should work together to ensure that 16- and 17-year olds who present as homeless receive adequate support. The *G v Southwark* judgment in 2009 clarified that the Children Act 1989 takes precedence over duties under homelessness legislation in the case of homeless 16- and 17-year olds, because they are still children. Joint working is therefore critical. In particular, Children’s Services should carry out an assessment of whether a child at risk of homelessness is a “child in need”, which would be the case for almost all homeless 16- and 17-year olds where their homelessness could not be prevented. They would become “looked after” under S.20 of the Children Act 1989 unless, based on their wishes and their competence to make such a decision, the young person decides they do not want to become “looked after”.

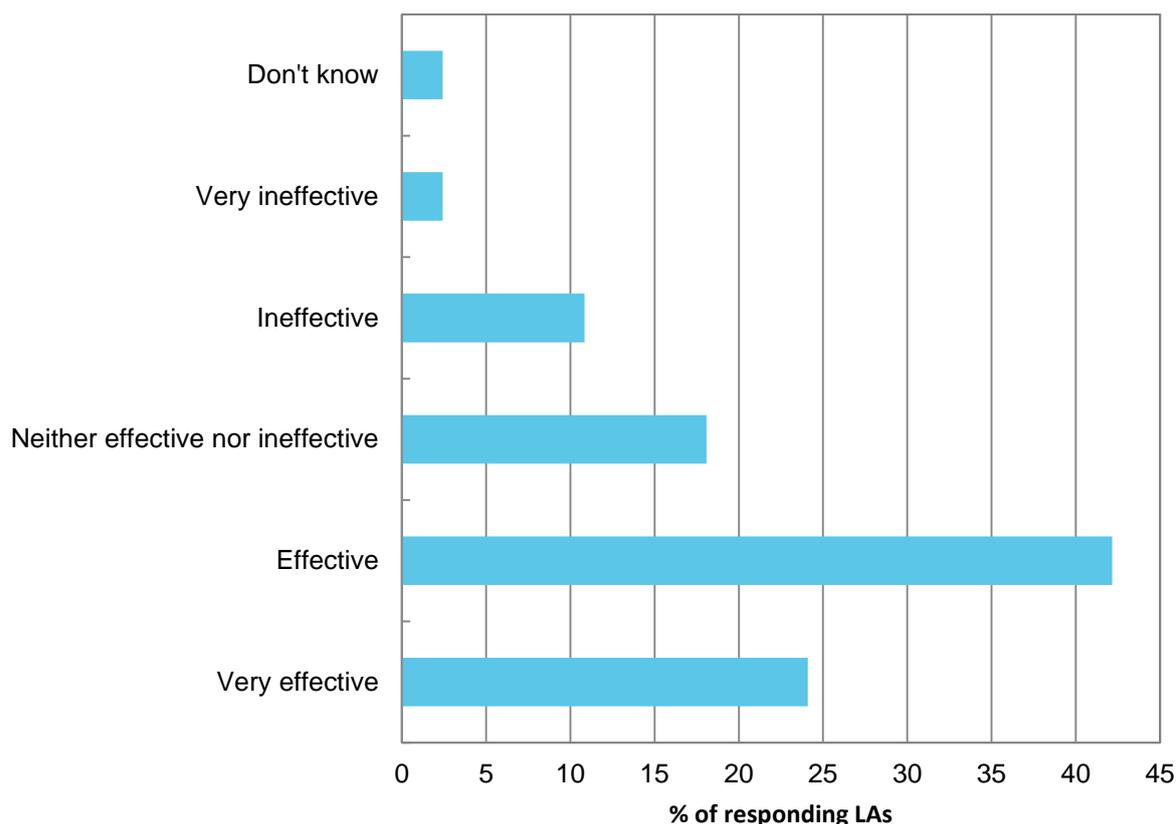
²⁹ For further information on the Positive Pathway Model see: <http://www.stbasils.org.uk/Resources/St%20Basils/Documents/0513%20update%20Developing%20a%20positive%20accommodation%20and%20support%20pathway%20for%20young%20people.pdf>.

Previous analysis by Homeless Link and Inside Housing, however, suggested that many local authorities were not effectively working together, with less than half of 16- and 17-year olds being assessed by Children’s Services.³⁰

Encouragingly the survey findings suggest that local authorities may have made some progress in improving joint working between Children’s Services and Housing. Nearly all local authorities (95%) reported having a joint protocol in place detailing how the two departments should work together, while 80% said their Children’s Services and Housing departments work together to target young people. Two thirds of local authorities reported that joint working was effective or very effective, compared to around half in last year’s survey (Graph 8).

There was no significant change from last year in the proportion of local authorities reporting that joint working was ineffective or very ineffective: 13% this year compared with 17% last year. Some survey respondents from the local authorities’ Housing department reported that Children’s Services were reluctant to have a primary role in assisting homeless 16- and 17-year olds, despite having a protocol in place. Two reported that Children’s Services did not conduct their assessments quickly enough.

Graph 8: Effectiveness of joint working between the Children’s Services and Housing departments



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=83

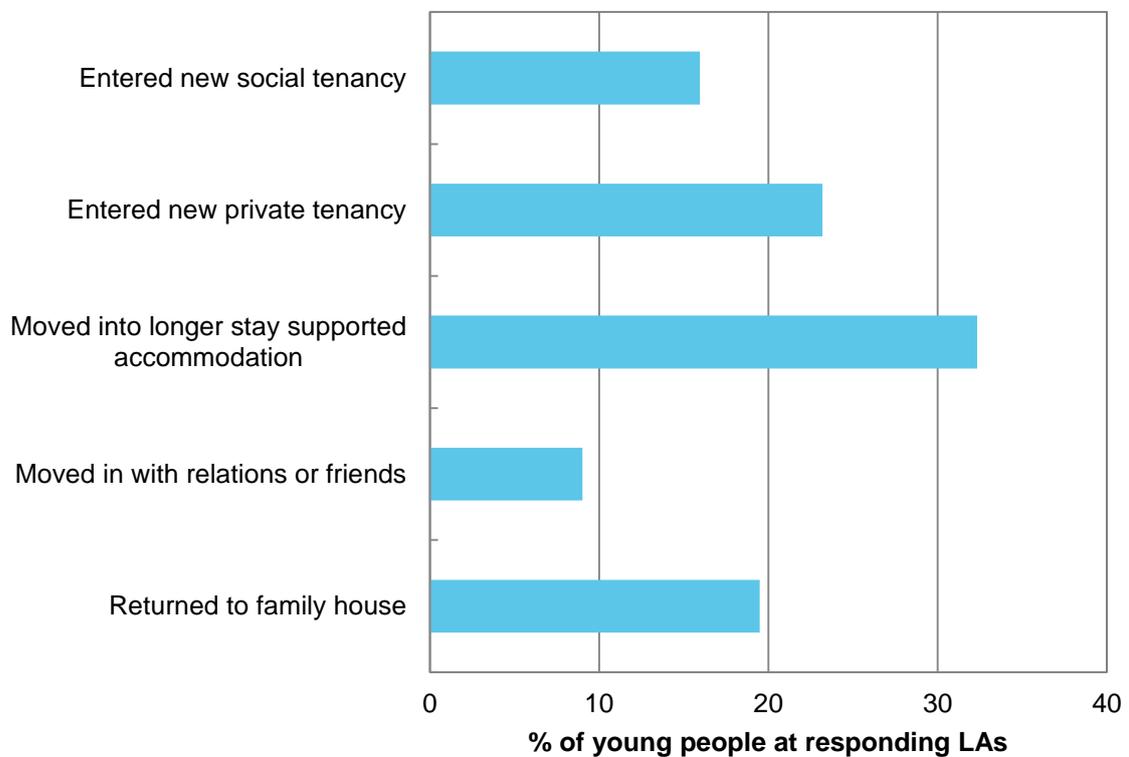
³⁰ Homeless Link (2013), *No Excuses: Preventing homelessness services for the next generation*, Homeless Link (2013), *Survey of Needs and Provision 2013*: http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/SNAP%202013%20Final%20180413_2.pdf

Accommodation options when homelessness is prevented

Moving young people into longer-term supported accommodation is the main way local authorities prevent homelessness, preventing around a third of youth homelessness cases in this way (Graph 9). A further third of young people return to their family home or are housed with relatives or friends. There has been little change in these since last year.

There has, however, been an increase in the proportion of young people's homelessness being prevented by moving into the private rented sector, while the proportion of those moving into social housing has fallen. This could reflect the shortage of social housing, although accessing the private rented sector is also becoming more difficult with rents in some areas rising relative to Housing Benefit.

Graph 9: Local authorities main options to move-on options



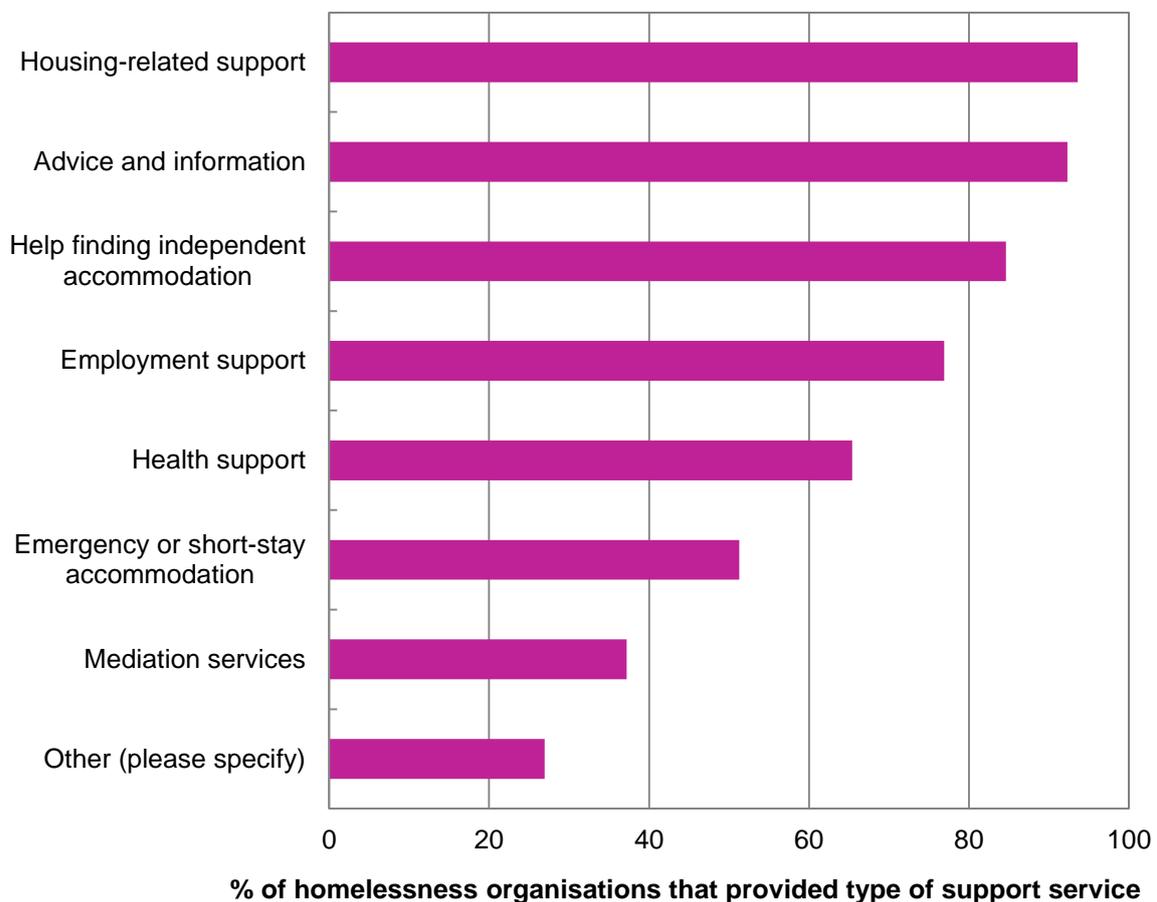
Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=59

SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE

Young people experiencing homelessness often need a range of support to assist them with the varying issues that they are facing. Nearly all homelessness agencies working with young people provide housing-related support, which includes accommodation, or advice and information for people to find independent accommodation (Graph 10). Around three-quarters of agencies provide employment support, which is a key need for those who are NEET, and around two-thirds provide health support.

A third of homelessness agencies provide mediation services between young homeless people and their families. With so much youth homelessness caused by family breakdown, mediation can be a very effective route for preventing homelessness amongst young people. For example, Depaul UK’s research found that homelessness was prevented for 82% of the young people using its Reconnect mediation service.³¹

Graph 10: Support services provided by homelessness organisations



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=78

The availability of external support services for young people has stayed about the same compared with last year, with the number of homelessness agencies reporting an increase in availability broadly equal to those reporting a decrease (Graph 11). More homelessness

³¹ Depaul UK (2011), ‘Homelessness Prevention: Can we afford not to?’: <http://www.depauluk.org/uploads/documents/homessness-prevention-report-reconnect.pdf>

agencies, however, reported an increase in the availability of services that they provide themselves since last year.

Graph 11: Availability of support services provided by homelessness agencies



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=74

Lisa's story³²

Six months ago, Lisa left home. She had no support from social services initially as her mother wanted her to come home, and in their first assessment there were no details of abuse. Eventually, Lisa's mother admitted to abusing her, but social services did not reassess her case. She lived intermittently on the streets or with friends, until she found an organisation that helped her get a place in a hostel and arranged mediation with her mother. She has now been living in the hostel for four months and has found staff helpful and supportive, giving her time to focus on herself and what she wants to do with her life. Lisa is now studying and says this is something she would not have been able to do had she stayed living at home.

Three-quarters (73%) of homelessness agencies indicated that there were not enough support services available for homeless people with high support needs. This may be in part due to reductions in homelessness services as a result of local authority funding reductions. One staff member also described how organising assessments could be difficult because of long waiting lists.

These changes may reflect a broader trend across the homelessness sector with results from Homeless Link's *Survey of Needs and Provision 2013* 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.³³

³² Case study is from interviews conducted as part of the research. The interviewee's name has been changed to maintain anonymity.

³³ Homeless Link (2013), *Survey of Needs and Provision 2013*: http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/SNAP%202013%20Final%20180413_2.pdf

An increasing number of homelessness agencies are sometimes unable to assist young people who come to them for support. This is concerning as vulnerable young people may have no other options to approach for help. This year, 59% of agencies reported that they had been unable to assist some young people in September 2013 because of limited capacity (55% last year). Reasons for refusing access include because the service was full and because young people's needs were too high:

“Say if someone was on suicide watch, we don't have the staffing resources or the specialism to be able to provide that person with the adequate support to make sure they were safe and healthy. So we wouldn't be doing the right thing allowing them to come and stay if we can't provide that support.”

Interview with front-line staff, homelessness agency

ACCOMMODATION FOR YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE

Young people who become homeless have a wide range of needs, but securing safe and appropriate accommodation is often the most pressing.

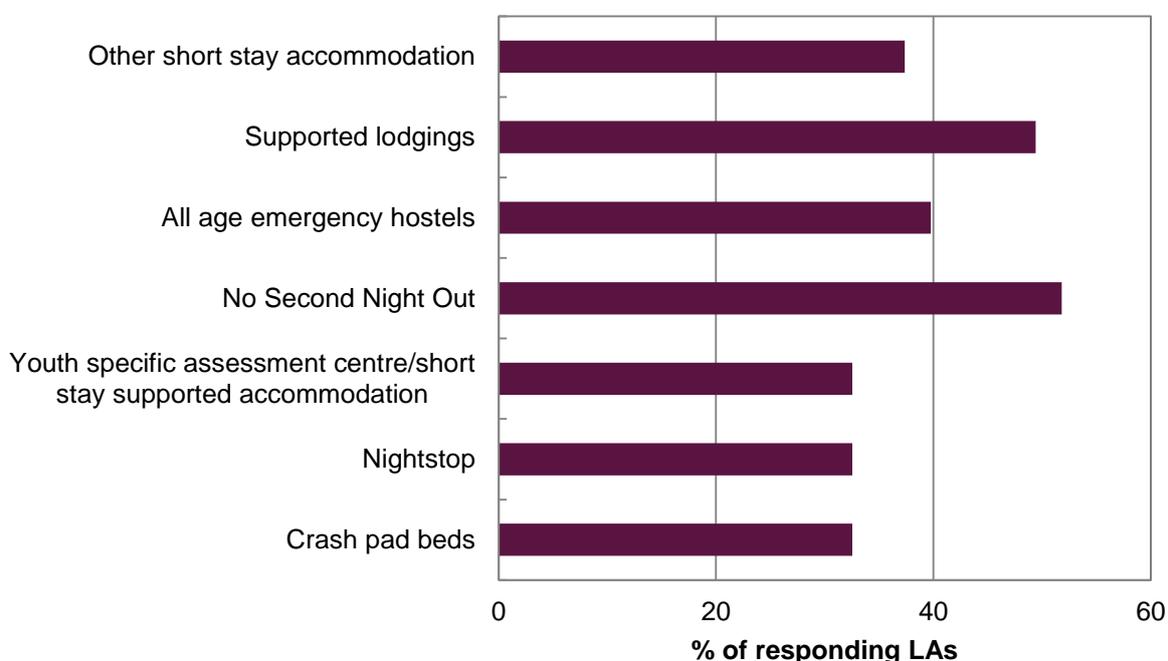
Emergency accommodation

Generic emergency accommodation for single homeless people can be inappropriate for young people if, for example, they are accommodated with older homeless people with more complex needs. More appropriate youth-specific accommodation is usually a better emergency accommodation option for young people. Examples include nightstop or emergency supported lodgings, in which young people can stay with a host family in their own home, receiving short-term support and some respite from a crisis situation.

The most widely available emergency accommodation were No Second Night Out (NSNO)³⁴ and supported lodgings, with around half of local authorities having these provisions in place (Graph 12). A third of local authorities had a youth-specific assessment centre or short-stay accommodation available in their area. 30-40% reported having other accommodation options available for young people, including Nightstop, crash pad beds and all-age emergency hostels.

Bed & Breakfast accommodation is deemed unsuitable for young homeless people as it provides no support, is of varying quality and there are major safeguarding concerns. Many local authorities, however, do use B&Bs for young people because of limited alternative emergency accommodation. 43% of local authorities reported using B&Bs occasionally to accommodate young people, and 12% said they used B&Bs often.

Graph 12: Emergency accommodation available for young people



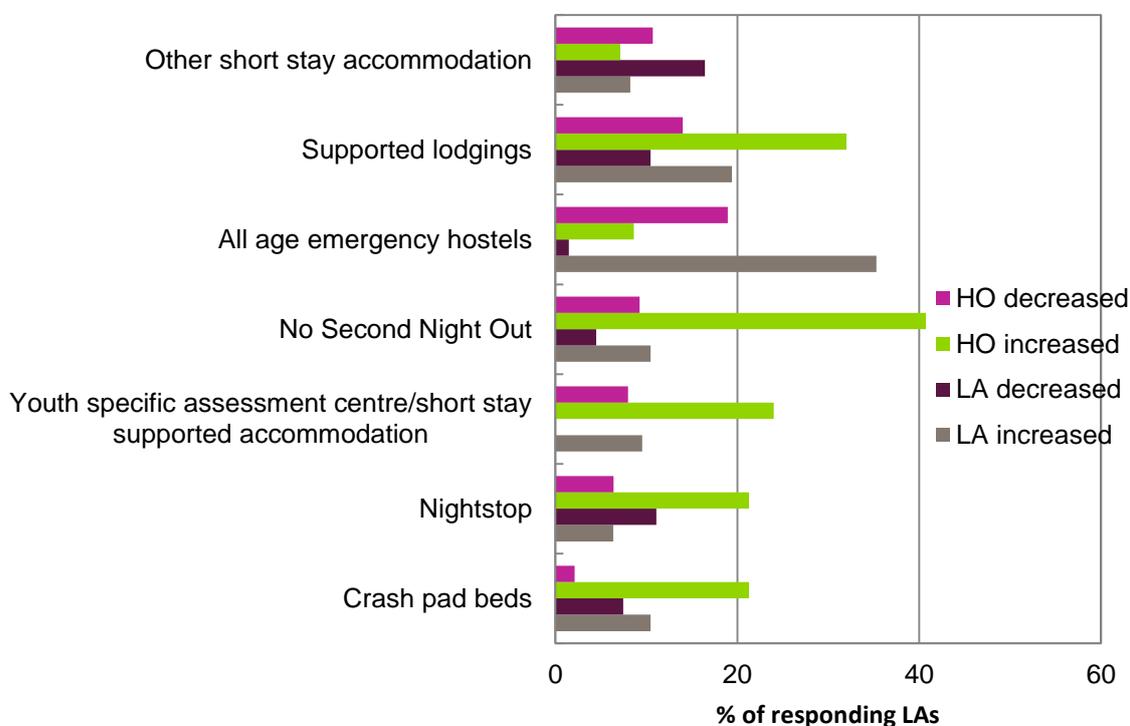
Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=83

³⁴ No Second Night Out (NSNO) is a series of principles with the key aim of local authorities establishing effective local responses to help rough sleepers and, in particular, those new to the streets to be helped off the streets as quickly as possible. For more information see www.gov.uk/government/publications/vision-to-end-rough-sleeping-2

Local authorities and homelessness agencies expressed differing opinions on the adequacy of emergency accommodation for young people. Generally, local authorities indicated that the amount of emergency accommodation has increased since last year (Graph 13). 35% of local authorities reported an increase in all-age emergency accommodation since last year (which is often unsuitable for young people under 18), compared to only 2% reporting a fall, although more providers said the provision by all-age hostels had fallen from the previous year.

68% of homelessness agencies indicated there was not enough youth-specific emergency accommodation available in their area, although some homelessness agencies reported a rise. Homelessness agencies reported that all other types of emergency accommodation had increased, with NSNO increasing more than other types.

Graph 13: Changes in the availability of emergency accommodation



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; local authorities N=83; : N= 76

Supported housing

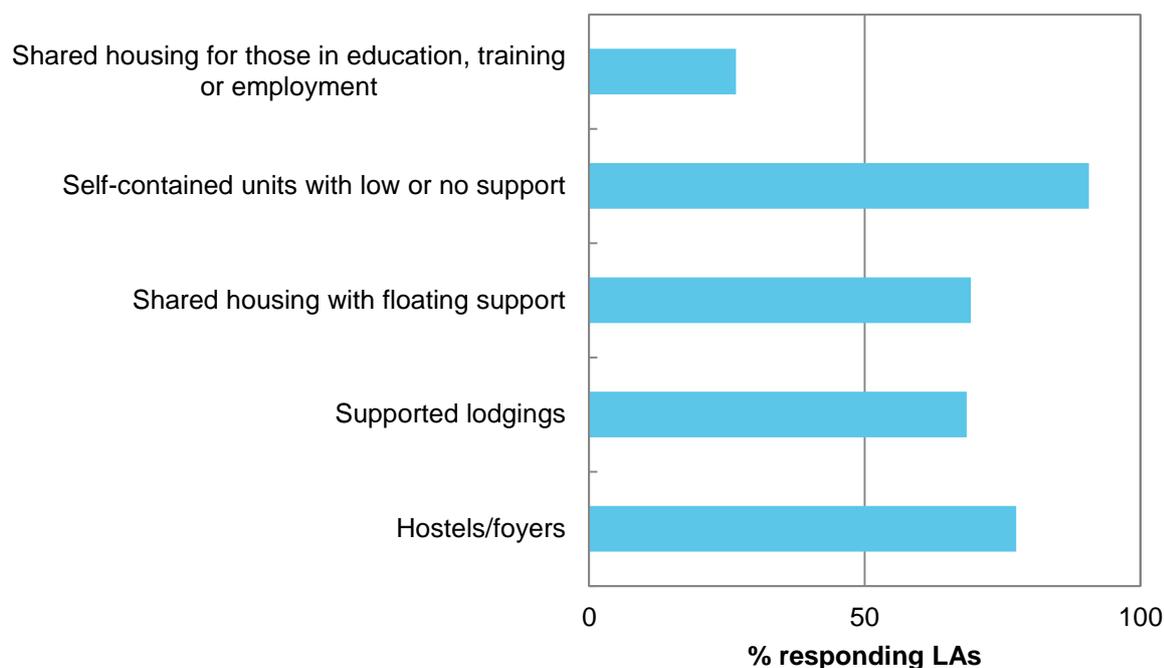
For many young people, the crisis of homelessness is symptomatic of other, more complex issues that they need support with. A tenancy will not, for many young people, be a stand-alone solution without some floating housing-related support. For many young people, some time in supported accommodation, such as a hostel, supported lodgings or a foyer, is an opportunity to prepare for a tenancy, develop life skills and get into education, training or planning for employment.

The most widely used supported housing options available for young people were hostels and foyers, with 55% of local authorities saying this was the most prevalent form of supported housing available in their area. A fifth of local authorities reported that shared

housing with floating support was most used, while 13% said self-contained units with low or no support was most used.

More than two-thirds of local authorities said self-contained units with low or no support, hostels and foyers, shared housing with floating support, and supported lodgings were available in their areas (Graph 14). A minority of local authorities had shared housing available for young people in employment, education and training. The availability of these types of accommodation appears little changed from the previous year.

Graph 14: Supported housing available in local authorities



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=80

Move-on accommodation

Young homeless people who are unable to return to their family have three main accommodation options when they move on from supported housing: local authority-owned housing, housing association accommodation, and the private rented sector.

Local authorities reported moving most young people into social housing (Graph 15), but this was not a common move-on route for young people accessing homelessness agencies, perhaps in part reflecting geographical differences in our survey respondents. This difference is also probably because young people accepted as statutorily homeless by a local authority would be given reasonable preference in the allocations scheme. Most young people accessing support from homelessness agencies moved back to live with family and friends,³⁵ with the private rented sector the second most common route.

Access to the private rented sector is becoming increasingly difficult, particularly in some parts of the country including London and the South East (see section below on welfare reform). Young people, in particular, can struggle to secure a tenancy, in part due to changes in the Shared Accommodation Rate.³⁶ Homeless Link's 2013 research found that only 5% of shared properties in London were affordable for young people claiming the

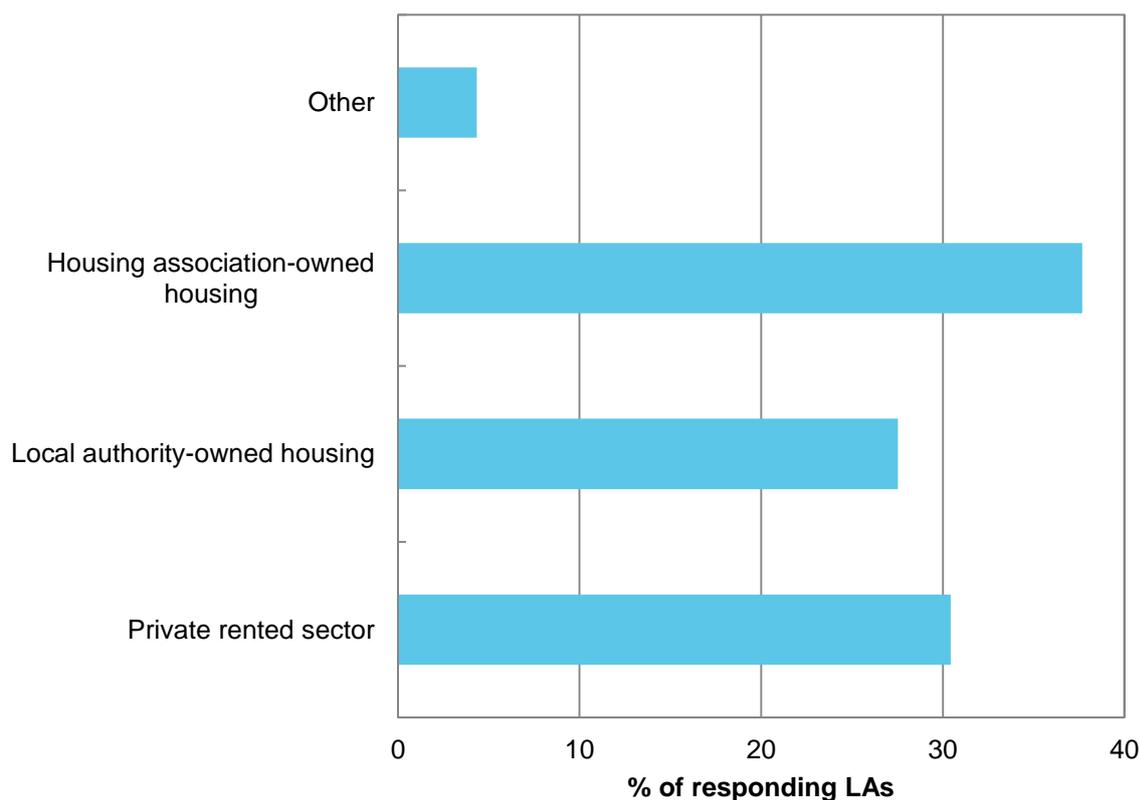
³⁵ This was not a question option in the local authority survey.

³⁶ The level of benefit paid to people aged under 35 to rent a room in a shared house.

Shared Accommodation Rate, and even fewer had landlords willing to rent to young people that claim benefits.³⁷ In more expensive London boroughs, a much smaller proportion was affordable.

Frontline staff at homelessness agencies suggested that young people can have unrealistic expectations of where they will be able to move to. One described that some young people believe they will be accommodated in social housing, but this is often not the case. With changes to welfare in particular, the majority of young homeless people will have to find shared accommodation in the private rented sector.

Graph 15: Main move-on accommodation options used by local authorities



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; N=80

Many local authorities have support schemes in place to help young people find accommodation, particularly in the private rented sector. Nearly all local authorities reported operating a rent deposit or cashless bond scheme which young people could access. Many local authorities (82%) also built relationships with private sector landlords that would consider young people as tenants. Only a third, however, had worked with landlords to develop specific shared accommodation options for young single people.

³⁷ Homeless Link (2013), *Nowhere to Move* http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attached-downloads/No%20Where%20To%20Move_FINAL.pdf

WELFARE REFORMS

Many of the recent and proposed changes to the welfare benefits system have had an impact on young people.

Changes to the **Shared Accommodation Rate** – the Housing Benefit paid to claimants limited to renting a room in a shared house – have had a substantial impact on young people. In 2012, it was extended to cover 25-34 year old claimants who previously received enough Housing Benefit to pay for a one-bedroom self-contained property. At the same time, fewer privately rented properties became affordable for claimants as the Government reduced the rate at which the Local Housing Allowance (which the Shared Accommodation Rate falls under) is set from 50% to 30% of the local rental market rate. Going forward, even fewer properties are likely to be affordable under the rate as the Government caps rate increases to be in line with the Consumer Price Index. Already after the first review of the Shared Accommodation Rate in April 2013, the revised rate was below 30% of the local rental market rate in two-thirds of rental market areas.³⁸

42% of local authorities and 41% of homelessness agencies said the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate to those under-35 years had adversely affected young people under-25 by a great deal (Graph 16). Many also reported that capping Local Housing Allowance to the 30th percentile rent has affected young people, but to a lesser degree. Comparatively few reported that capping the increase of the Shared Accommodation Rate to the lower inflation rate has affected young people.

The proposed extension of **non-dependant deductions to Housing Benefit** under Universal Credit to cover 21-24 year olds jobseekers may also have an effect on young people. Non-dependant deductions reduce the amount of Housing Benefit that a household receives when a non-dependant person is living in the household as they are seen to be able to support themselves. At present, the deductions only apply to people aged 25 or above, and people aged under 25 and in work. The extension could lead to increased financial difficulties amongst families, which may put stress on family relationships.³⁹

Changes to the **sanctions** regime on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in late 2012 are reported to be affecting young people as well. JSA and ESA claimants can receive sanctions if they do not fulfil various requirements for receiving benefits, such as attending an appointment at the Jobcentre Plus. One of the main changes was to extend the length of the minimum sanction from 1-2 weeks to 4 weeks.

Homeless Link's research found that many young people and their parents are experiencing financial difficulties during this period, which can lead to added stress⁴⁰ It also suggested that young people were disproportionately affected by sanctions compared with older claimants, which was in line with data published by the Department for Work and Pensions which showed 46% of JSA sanctions imposed since October 2012 were on claimants aged 18-24 despite these people accounting for 25-30% of the total benefit caseload during the period.⁴¹ People with mental health or substance misuse issues were also more likely to be

³⁸ See Local Housing Allowance Tables produced by the Valuation Office Agency:
http://www.voa.gov.uk/corporate/_downloads/xls/April_2013_LHArates.xls

³⁹ Research by the Department for Work and Pensions in 2011 found that reduced family income, in this case because a family member had their benefits sanctioned, caused additional stress on family relationships. See: Dorset, George and Rolfe, *The Jobseeker's Allowance Skills Conditionality Pilot*, Department for Work and Pensions (2011), pp. 3:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214549/rrep768.pdf

⁴⁰ See *A High Cost to Pay: The impact of benefit sanctions on homeless people*, Homeless Link (2013):

http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-downloads/A%20High%20Cost%20to%20Pay%20Sept13_0.pdf

⁴¹ For data on the number of sanctions being imposed see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-and-employment-and-support-allowance->

sanctioned, in part because of their particular difficulties in meeting Jobcentre Plus requirements. Frontline staff working with young people explained that:

“There doesn’t seem to be that much allowance for young people with high support needs who are homeless who will struggle to make sign on appointments or work program appointments, and straightaway they are being sanctioned.”

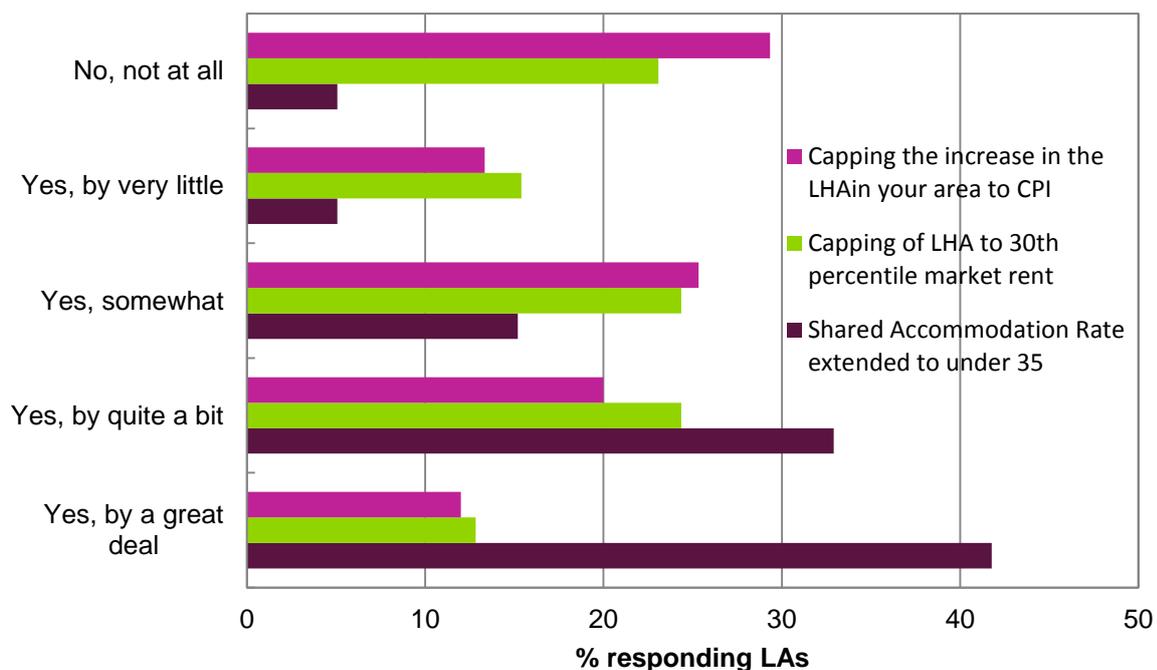
Interview with front-line staff, homelessness agency

When Universal Credit is introduced, claimants will receive benefits as a **monthly direct payment**. These payments may be challenging for young homeless people to manage if they lack financial budgeting skills. There is a risk that young people who are homeless may experience rent arrears and financial distress as a result:

“The thought of [young people] receiving that much money in one lump sum is terrifying because they don’t know how to budget and they’ve never been provided with the circumstances on how to budget.”

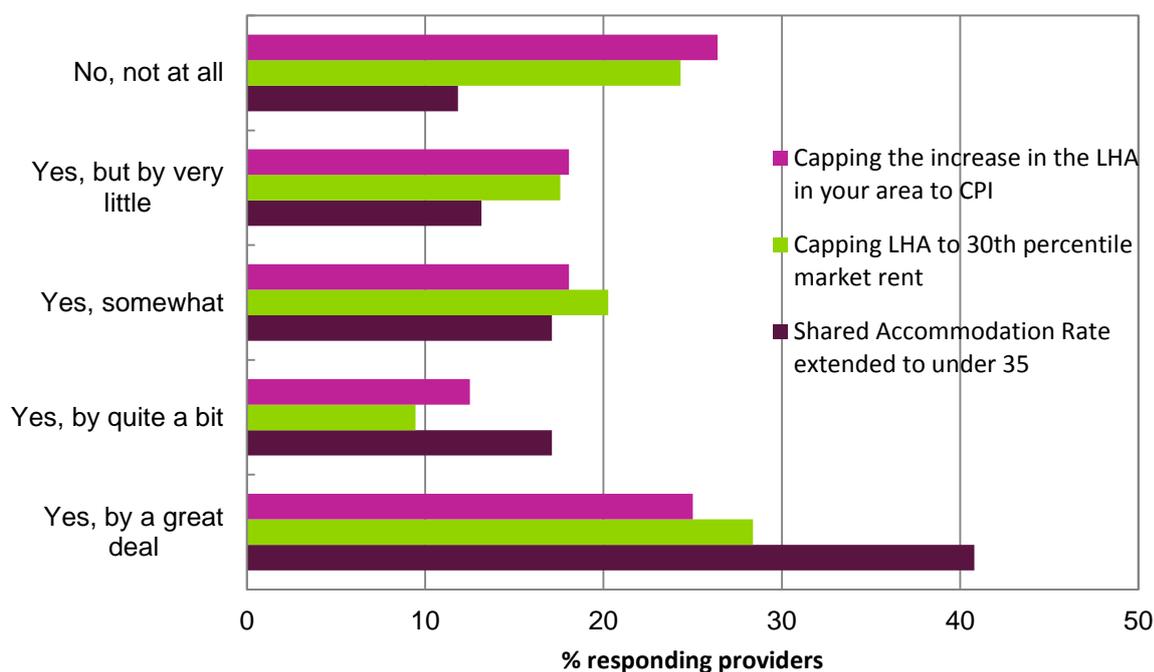
Interview with front-line staff, homelessness agency

**Graph 16: Impact of the Shared Accommodation Rate on young people
Local authorities’ responses**



sanctions-decisions-made-to-june-2013; for data on the JSA benefit caseload see: http://tabulation-tool.dwp.gov.uk/100pc/jsa/tabtool_jsa.html.

Homelessness organisations' responses



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2013; Local authorities: N=79; Providers: 78

Julie's story⁴²

Julie grew up in foster care in a busy household with several other children. She got on well with her foster carers and stayed with the family for many years. At 18, social services made her move out because there were too many other children in the household, and Julie was counted as an adult. The local authority moved her into a hostel, where she has now been for six months. At first, she was very angry about being forced to move, but has been supported by her keyworker to try to manage her feelings. It was difficult at first for her to apply for Housing Benefit as she had no passport and her biological mother had her birth certificate. She then received a benefits sanction for four weeks because she didn't receive letters that were sent to her foster carers' address. Julie is now trying to pay off her rent arrears, and is looking forward to moving out of the hostel and into more permanent housing of her own.

⁴² Case study is from interviews conducted as part of the research. The case study's name has been changed to maintain anonymity.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations by the National Youth Reference Group

The National Youth Reference Group (NYRG) is made up of young people aged 16-25 from across England who are homeless or have experienced homelessness. The group exists to assist national and local government, and homeless organisations, to develop and improve their involvement opportunities for young people. The NYRG was asked to provide recommendations based on the findings from this report.

Greater public awareness of homelessness and young homeless people's options

We recommend that:

- Homelessness organisations and councils carry out early intervention work in schools informing young people under 16 about the realities of becoming homeless;
- Families, including parents with young children, and the general public are made more aware of homelessness and the options available for homeless people; and
- Staff at homelessness organisations and young people are made more aware of the housing options available to them, and both are adequately trained on the processes of attaining accommodation.

Prevention

We recommend that:

- More mediation services are available for young people and their families; and
- More safe social activities are available to occupy young people and reduce stress on families. Some examples are community centres or youth camps.

Young people's needs for education, training and employment

We recommend that:

- Young people receive help from the Government to fund their studies and training;
- Councils do more to find and create suitable work for young people;
- More options for work and training are made available; and
- Young people have more of a say in the type of work or training that they take part in.

Support services

We recommend that:

- Support services are less generic and are more tailored for each young person's individual needs;
- Homelessness organisations consult with young people when designing and implementing support services; and

- The quality of support provided to young people by services is accurately evaluated, and sub-standard services are improved.

Housing options

We recommend that:

- More move-on accommodation and emergency accommodation are made available for young homeless people;
- Young people with similar support needs are housed together to ensure young people's safety;
- Innovative solutions are explored to make more housing available for young people, such as housing co-operatives where residents collectively manage their accommodation; and
- The criteria for attaining move-on accommodation account for the entire time that a young person spends in supported accommodation, and not only their most recent stay. The criteria should prioritise young people in work more highly.

Welfare reforms

We recommend that:

- Both local and central governments ensure that young people do not experience additional hardship as a result of the welfare reforms, and they are not penalised for taking steps to improve their situation, such as enrolling in some forms in education;
- Young people's support workers are allowed to further assist young people when working with the Jobcentre Plus; and
- Housing Benefit conditions are changed so young people can afford to work while living in a hostel.

Homeless Link endorses these recommendations by the National Youth Reference Group. In addition, we ask that:

National government

- Takes the needs of young homeless people into account in the delivery and development of in-work requirements, such as Help to Work, to ensure they offer supportive routes into employment and training.
- Takes account, when planning future welfare changes, of the challenges young homeless people can face and ensures that reforms do not disproportionately affect young people. In particular, we urge the Government to consider the impact that withdrawing Housing Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance for under 25s would have on youth homelessness, and ask them to reconsider these proposals.

Local government

- Protects investment in services to support young homeless people, particularly around preventing homelessness at an early stage.

- Continue to prioritise partnerships between Housing and Children's Services departments to provide more co-ordinated responses to young people approaching them for help.
- Use the Positive Pathway model to ensure appropriate accommodation options are in place for young people depending on their personal needs.

Homelessness agencies

- Provide services that are appropriate for young people, including youth-specific accommodation and family mediation services.

End Youth Homelessness Alliance

Homeless Link is part of the [End Youth Homelessness Alliance](http://www.eyh.org.uk), which is a group of charities from the homeless sector, the field of mediation, youth employment and health professionals along with major businesses that have joined forces to raise awareness of the complex challenge and cost of youth homelessness, to pool expertise and best practice to help government and wider society understand and better respond to the issue - www.eyh.org.uk.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

The findings in *Young & Homeless 2013* are based on surveys of homelessness service providers and local authority Housing departments, as well as interviews with young people who have experienced homelessness and staff at homelessness services.

Surveys: In October 2013, Homeless Link sent a web-based survey to 294 members which included accommodation providers, advice services, day centres and housing providers throughout England. We also sent the survey concurrently to contacts in Housing departments at 306 local authorities in England. The surveys asked participants about the number of young people that use their services, the support that young people need and that they are able to provide, and the issues young people face. Many of the survey questions were also asked in youth homelessness surveys that we conducted in previous years.

In total, we received 79 usable responses from homelessness agencies and 90 usable responses from local authorities. This represents response rates of 27% and 29% respectively, which was broadly comparable with previous years.

Interviews: In October and November 2013, we conducted semi-structured interviews with two homelessness organisations and one service user panel. In total, we interviewed 12 young people and 3 staff from three services from England. We chose a purposive sample based on our existing contacts and membership in sector panels. We used the findings from the interviews illustratively only to provide additional context around our survey results.