



NO EXPECTATIONS: Access to and experiences of social and private accommodation for homeless young people

Glossary

Priority need:

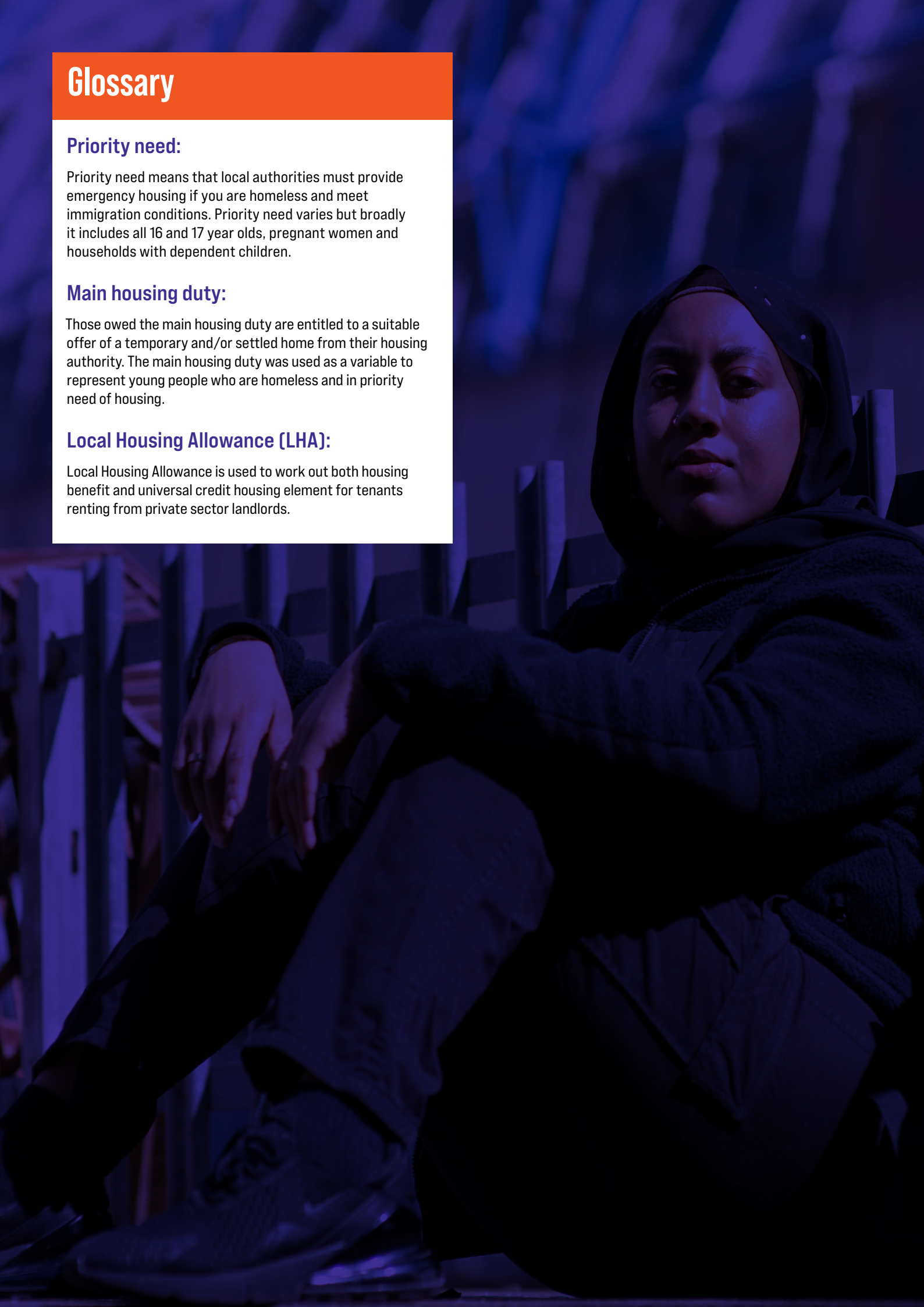
Priority need means that local authorities must provide emergency housing if you are homeless and meet immigration conditions. Priority need varies but broadly it includes all 16 and 17 year olds, pregnant women and households with dependent children.

Main housing duty:

Those owed the main housing duty are entitled to a suitable offer of a temporary and/or settled home from their housing authority. The main housing duty was used as a variable to represent young people who are homeless and in priority need of housing.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA):

Local Housing Allowance is used to work out both housing benefit and universal credit housing element for tenants renting from private sector landlords.



Contents

Introduction	4
Methodology	4
Policy context: Housing, independence and young people	4
Access to social housing for young people	5
Understanding social housing inaccessibility	7
Access to private rented accommodation	8
Young people's experiences of moving in to the private rented sector	9
Stepping Stone Accommodation	10
Conclusion	10
Recommendations	11
Appendix	12

Centrepoint would like to express gratitude to all the local authorities in England who provided data in response to Freedom of Information requests on social housing allocations, as well as the young people and stakeholders who participated in the research.

Author: Frankiebo Taylor
Centrepoint, 2023

Introduction

Over the last few decades, social housing has become increasingly inaccessible for young people with experiences of homelessness. This is because the nation's social housing stock has been depleted through policies such as the 1980's Right to Buy Scheme, while not being replenished at a proportionate rate. Similarly, private renting has become progressively more inaccessible due to increased rates of rent, growing competition and landlord discrimination. As such, young people, particularly those with experiences of homelessness and who rely on benefits as their main source of income, are frequently blocked from the private rented sector. This research explores these conditions by investigating the accessibility of social and private rented sector accommodation for young people experiencing homelessness in England. To achieve this, the research first examines the social rented sector by analysing social housing supply and demand. The research then explores the private rented sector, by investigating its affordability and accessibility.



Methodology

- A survey of front-line staff working for 30 organisations supporting over 800 young people across England.
- Qualitative interviews with young people with experiences of homelessness and key local authority staff members.
- Comparison between social housing allocations and main housing duty rates (2021-22 & 2022-23): Freedom of Information requests were sent to a representative sample of 51 local authorities in England, comprised of a range of rural and urban localities (see table 1 in the appendix) asking for information on social housing allocations in 2021/22 & 22/23. This data was then compared against data showing numbers of young people who were owed a main housing duty from Centrepont's annual Youth Homelessness Databank 2021/22 & 22/23 and data on the number of people owed a main housing duty from statutory homelessness statistics 2021/22 & 22/23.^{1,2}
- Analysis of LHA rates: comparing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Shared Accommodation Rates published by the government³ to private sector rent data submitted by local authorities to the ONS to reflect the financial year 2022/2023.⁴



Policy context: Housing, independence and young people

During the financial year 2022/23, Centrepont estimated that 135,800 young people in England approached their council for help as they were homeless or at risk of homelessness.⁵ This represents an increase of 5 per cent compared to the previous financial year.

Many homeless young people who have been assessed and found to be eligible for housing support will be referred into supported accommodation by their local authority. Each year, Centrepont provides supported accommodation to over 850 homeless young people aged 16 – 25 who require support to process trauma, build skills and develop independence. Supported housing is intended as temporary accommodation

which works as a platform to enable homeless young people to access stable housing and sustainable employment.

However, if young people are unable to move on from supported accommodation, the continued development of their independent living skills can be restricted.⁶ In July 2018, Centrepont reported that almost one in five young people living in its supported accommodation were ready to move on but were unable to do so, with a third having been ready to move on for longer than six months.⁷ In the current context of the cost of living crisis, it is likely that this figure would now be higher making it harder for young people to save for deposits and afford increasing rates of rent.

Access to social housing for young people

“It becomes a thing of, you can only be disappointed if you have expectations. And we have no expectations.”

Josh, London

Over the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23 in England, there was a 3 per cent shortfall between the average percentage of young people who were entitled to social housing (17 per cent) and the average percentage allocated to social housing (14 per cent) in England.

The regions with the greatest shortfalls in allocations in 2021/22 were the East Midlands (13 per cent shortfall), the South West (9 per cent shortfall), and the North East (8 per cent). These regions also had the highest demand for social housing from young people, while being below the national average for the number of vacant dwellings owned by housing associations in each region.⁸ This suggests that these shortfalls may be due to limited local housing capacity.

By contrast, the regions exceeding allocations in 2021/22 were Yorkshire and the Humber (6.5 per cent excess) and the West Midlands (2 per cent). These regions had the lowest demand for social housing from young people out of all the regions, however they were still below the national average for the number of vacant dwellings owned by housing associations in each region.⁹ This suggests that these regions may be exceeding allocations because there is less demand for social housing from young people – rather than excess housing supply.

Proportions of young people owed main duty vs social housing allocated to young people

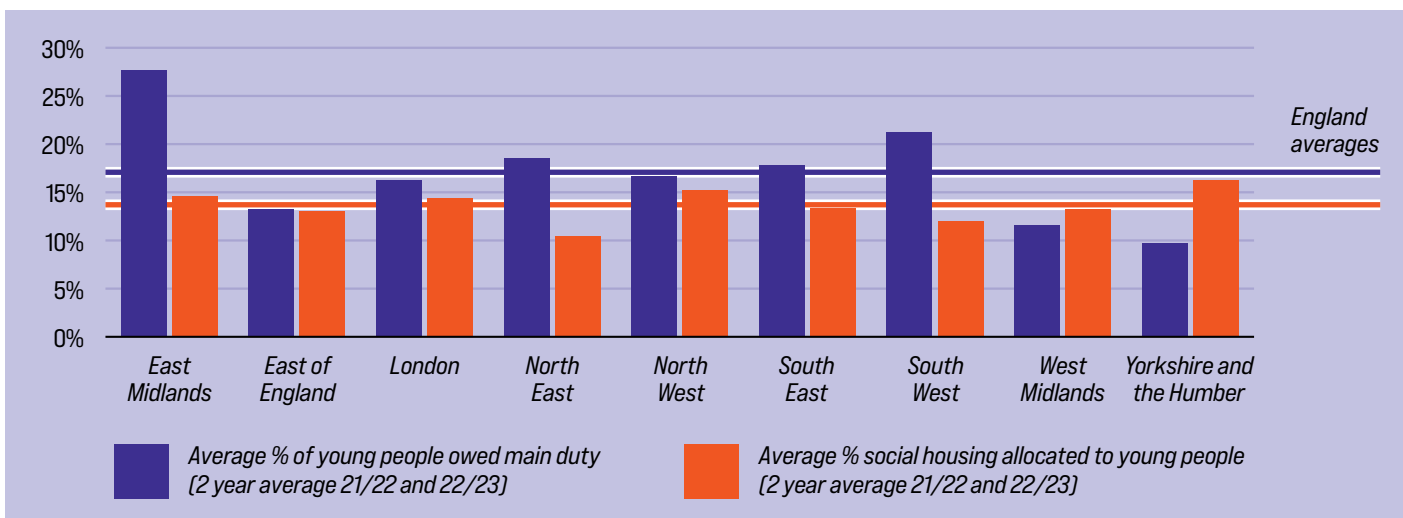


Figure 1: showing the two year average of the proportion of young people who were owed a main housing duty and who were allocated social housing.

When examining the two financial years separately, there was a 3 per cent improvement in the average shortfall in allocations compared to the main housing duty for 2022/23 (2 per cent) compared to 2021/22 (5 per cent) in England. This may be explained by the net increase in social homes of nearly 34,000 in England between 2021/22 and 2022/23.¹⁰ In particular, there was a 9 per cent increase in one bedroom general needs social homes – the type of homes that the majority of young people with experiences of homelessness will likely access.¹ This shows that the development of one bedroom social homes is likely to support homeless young people to find secure accommodation. Therefore, it is imperative that the government prioritises the build of these size social homes in order to end youth homelessness.



¹ The majority of young people in need of social housing are likely to be single, with no dependent family. Therefore, they will be limited to applying for one bedroom or smaller social homes – see the preceding section ‘Types of homes needed’ for more information.

In 2022/23, some local authorities were critically failing to meet demand for social housing:



In one local authority in the South West, **47 per cent** of those who were owed a main housing duty were young people. However, **only 10 per cent** of their social housing was allocated to members of this cohort, a shortfall of **37 per cent**. During this year, **20 per cent** of councils had a shortfall in allocations of **10 per cent** or more. This indicates that there is a large population of young people in many local authorities across England who are in priority need for housing and who have been unable to access secure social housing. Without a social housing tenancy, these homeless young people may be unable to access independent accommodation and be stuck in hostels or temporary accommodation.

In 2022/23, other local authorities were found to be meeting demand:



During this year, **50 per cent** of councils allocated **the same or a greater share** of social housing to the proportion of young people that were owed a main housing duty. However, it is likely that, within these local authorities, there are many young people who are not owed a main housing duty and are not classed as priority need, yet are still in significant need of housing. Therefore, it is probable that, even when allocations are proportional to housing duty rates, many more vulnerable young people will continue to struggle to access stable housing.

Previous Centrepoint research has found that many young people in need of social housing may not be considered priority need and may not have even received a homelessness assessment. Centrepoint's Youth Homelessness Databank found that 35 per cent of young people who presented as homeless to their local authority did not receive an assessment.¹¹ This evidence suggests that there is a large number of young people who are in need of homelessness support and social housing who are not reflected in the main housing duty statistics. Therefore, all local authorities should be exceeding allocations relative to the main housing duty in order to truly meet the demand.

Low assessment rates persist in youth homelessness despite the fact that the government's Homelessness Code of Guidance (HCG)ⁱⁱ states that: "if there is reason to believe that they may be homeless or threatened with homelessness", the local authority must carry out an assessment to assess eligibility. In order to improve assessment rates, the government should amend the HCG to include what forms of evidence or burden of proof is acceptable in order to provide "reason to believe" someone is homeless or at risk of homelessness.



ii The Homelessness Code of Guidance: Guidance on how local authorities should exercise their homelessness functions in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Understanding social housing inaccessibility

Types of homes needed

One reason for the relative inaccessibility of social housing for young people with experiences of homelessness is that the types of social homes to which they can be allocated are limited. When applying for social housing, a single person without children is only usually able to apply for studio or one bedroom properties.¹² Over the last ten years, however, less than 18 per cent of Housing Association homes completed in England have been one bedroom properties. Moreover, single people who require a studio or one bedroom property have made up over 45 per cent of all social housing waiting lists in England every year since data became available in 2015/16.¹³ This figure is likely to be even higher for young people with experiences of homelessness. For example, 82 per cent of young people supported by Centrepont are single without children, meaning that they will only be eligible to apply for studio and one bedroom social housing when moving on.

“Because I can only go for one bedroom places and the only places I can find online are literally, not one bedrooms, usually they’re like two or three bedrooms. If they’re one bedrooms then they’re either for elderly people over 60, or they’re for people that have disabilities or special needs for them.”
Sam, Yorkshire and the Humber

Priority

Local authority staff who were interviewed highlighted that the demand for social housing is so high that only those who are extremely vulnerable are given top priority:

“We give people moving on [from supported accommodation] band two, so we give them a high priority but we have so many people who are on band one because they’re homeless and they’re vulnerable. The lack of housing means that generally social housing has been always been allocated to people in band one.”
– Local authority staff member, West Midlands

In 2022/23, 40 per cent of young people supported by Centrepont were care leavers and 7 per cent of young people were made homeless due to domestic abuse. Both of these characteristics are usually considered by local authorities as factors that would give applicants a high priority for social housing. However, during the same time period only 22 per cent of young people supported by Centrepont moved on in to social housing - meaning that a large number of young people who should have priority need status were not able to access social housing.

Quality and suitability of social housing

After the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, the government introduced an amendment to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill which requires social landlords to fix hazards, such as damp and mould, in their homes within strict time limits. However, survey and interview participants highlighted that issues of damp and mould still persist in the social homes offered to young people.

Over a third of respondents said that damp and mould was often an issue with the social homes offered to young people.

Survey respondents also highlighted that there are many key considerations which are not taken into account in the social housing options offered to young people (see figure 2). This could result in their move on being unsuccessful as the young person may struggle to feel at home and safe in their new environment. The chart below shows the percentage at which respondents rated factors as ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ considered in the social housing options offered to young people.

In your opinion, do the social housing options that are offered to young people take into account:

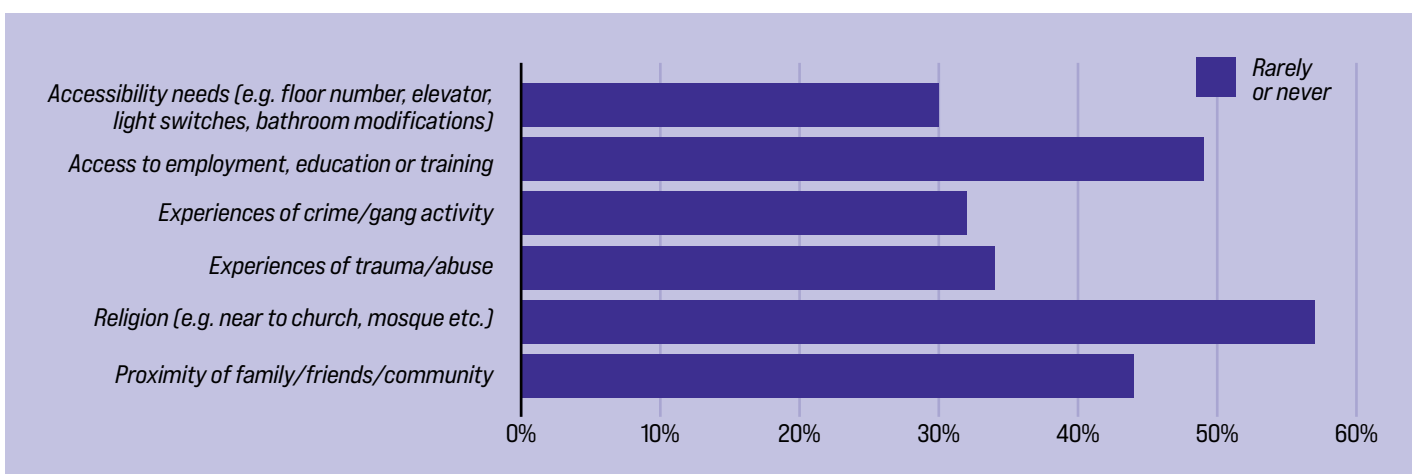


Figure 2: factors ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ taken into account in the social housing options that are offered to the young people that they support.

Access to private rented accommodation

When young people with experiences of homelessness are unable to access social housing, many of them are forced into the private rented sector for fear of falling back into homelessness or remaining in supported or temporary accommodation. However, the supply of rental properties in the UK is becoming increasingly scarce – as of March 2023, the number of available homes to rent had fallen by over a third in the past 18 months.¹⁴ This scarcity, amongst other factors, has driven up rates of rent for the remaining rental properties, with private rents in the UK now at the highest rate on record¹⁵. As such, young people with experiences of homelessness are increasingly unable to afford to access accommodation in the private rented sector:

- **78 per cent** of survey respondents reported that young people have become somewhat or much less able to afford their rent in the past year.
- **89 per cent** of survey respondents said that the cost of renting in the private rented sector is an extreme barrier to homeless young people trying to move into independent accommodation.

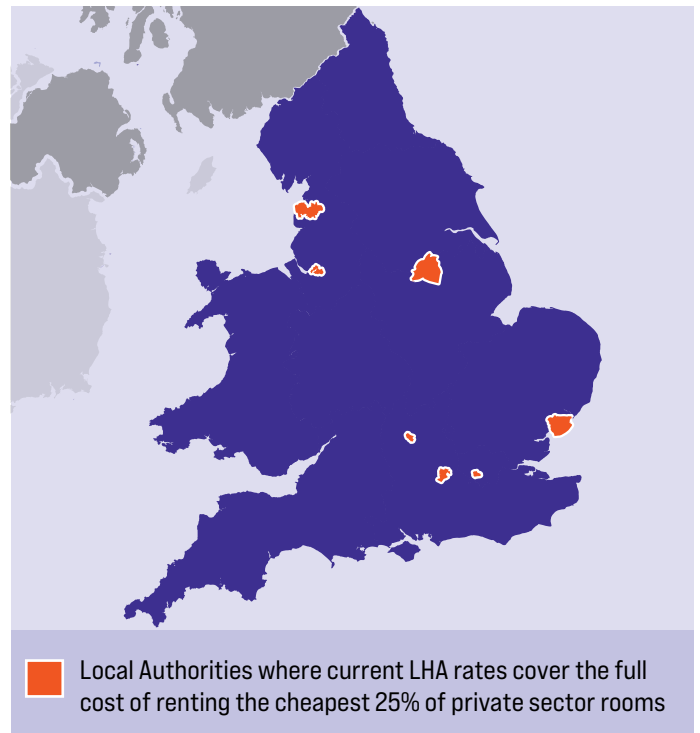
These findings correlate with Centrepoin’s internal data showing that, since 2019, there has been a 22 per cent increase in the length of time in which young people have been staying in Centrepoin supported accommodation. Additionally, in 2022/23 the proportion of young people moving on from Centrepoin into the private rented sector has declined by 36 per cent compared to the previous financial year. This suggests that young people have been finding it increasingly difficult to move on in to the PRS, and that, without improved support in both the short and long term, members of this cohort will continue to struggle to access affordable private rented sector accommodation.

In the 2023 Autumn Statement, the government sought to combat housing insecurity in the private rented sector by committing to raising Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, used to determine levels of Housing Benefit, to the 30th percentile of local market rents in April 2024.¹⁶ This intervention should improve the accessibility of the private rented sector for homeless young people in England by ensuring that those on benefits are able to afford their rent without needing to use their limited living funds to top up it up. The Chancellor has suggested that this intervention will support 1.6 million renters and save them on average £800 next year.¹⁷

While this policy will likely support young people to access and maintain private rented sector tenancies from April 2024, it is also clear that improved rates of LHA will not resolve the issue of private rented sector housing insecurity in the short term.

The significant gap between the Autumn Statement (November 2023) and the commencement of the policy (April 2024) will leave renters with little choice but to pay their rents at the current LHA rate. This will put young people in a very difficult position as:

- Current LHA rates only cover the full cost of renting the cheapest **25 per cent** of private sector rooms in 7 out of 211 local authorities in 2022/23.
- The average shortfall between rent and LHA entitlements was **nearly £100 a month** where LHA rates were less than the cheapest rental costs.
- For young people in receipt of benefits, these findings indicate that the private rented sector has been **highly unaffordable**.



Unfreezing LHA rates to accurately reflect the 30th percentile of current local market rents will help to ensure that young people can afford to rent privately upon leaving supported accommodation. However, LHA rates will be frozen again after the uplift in 2024 meaning this is only a temporary solution. Rents will continue to rise and it is imperative that LHA rents remain relative to true rental costs. Government must, therefore, ensure that LHA continues to be linked to the 30th percentile of local market rents.

Young people's experiences of moving in to the private rented sector

Guarantors and rent upfront

Young people who attempt to access private rented accommodation are often faced with challenges around providing a guarantor or paying several months' rent upfront. Some local authorities act as a guarantor, however local authority staff who were interviewed highlighted that many landlords are sceptical of this and would prefer their tenants to have an independent guarantor.

The majority
(84 per cent) of survey
respondents said the
need for a guarantor and
to pay rent upfront are
extreme barriers for young
people trying to move
on into the private
rented sector.

Discrimination

Nearly all young people and stakeholders who were interviewed highlighted that discrimination from landlords was a barrier to accessing private rented accommodation. Additionally, stakeholders highlighted that, as the rental market is very competitive, landlords are able to wait and offer their accommodation to the highest bidder.¹⁹

“My main issue is that landlords are very sneaky. And they try and find loopholes around people who claim DSS or UC, even though it is illegal.” – Nina, Manchester

Stakeholders additionally stressed that there is stigma around being a young person or care leaver in receipt of benefits. For instance, members of this cohort have previously been viewed as likely to be a perpetrator of anti-social behaviour or to fall into arrears. This can mean that landlords are reluctant to rent to them.

“A landlord see a young person and see antisocial behaviour, serious youth violence, they're not going to pay their rent”
– Local authority staff member, London

In order to try and address landlord discrimination, some local authorities offer cash incentives for landlords who accept homeless young people:

One London council offers £1500 per young person to private sector landlords who accept them as tenants. Additionally, the prospective tenants are assessed by the council in order to reassure landlords that the tenants are responsible. This scheme was implemented because the council has struggled to house homeless young people in the private rented sector.

“So we give landlords incentives, we give them a £1500 incentive to take our young people...”

Despite this incentive, however, there has been little uptake from landlords who do not see young people as reliable tenants, even when the incentive was increased to £4000 per young person.

“We've actually increased that [incentive]... and we still haven't got the moves. Because landlords don't want our young people”
– Local authority staff member, London

This example suggests that incentives may not be effective in eliminating landlord discrimination, and that there needs to be greater government regulation in order to combat the issue. The government will be implementing legislation as part of the Renters (Reform) Bill to make it illegal for landlords and agents to have blanket bans on renting to tenants in receipt of benefits.¹⁹ It is clear that this legislation is an urgent need in order to reduce barriers to private rented accommodation for homeless young people and it will be important that it is rigorously monitored in order to ensure that landlords comply with this legislation.



Stepping Stone Accommodation

While it is vital that the accessibility and affordability of social and private rented accommodation are improved to ensure that vulnerable young people are supported out of homelessness, it is also evident that these improvements alone will not solve the housing crisis in the short to medium term. Young people with experiences of homelessness also need access to alternative, innovative housing products that address local allocations and development gaps in the social housing and private rented sectors. These products should ideally work as a complement to, and not a competitor of, these more established tenures, providing housing to underserved cohorts of people - i.e., those with limited social housing priority and/or no savings.

Stepping Stone Accommodation, such as Centrepoin't's Independent Living and St Basil's Live and Work programmes, is one such example of an alternative housing product. This is because it provides genuinely affordable, fixed-term housing to young people who would otherwise struggle to access tenures in the private and social rented sectors. Rates of rent for Stepping Stone Accommodation are sub-market, meaning that they are deflated below LHA or social rent levels. Moreover, tenants living in Stepping Stone Accommodation have to be in work or an apprenticeship as a condition of their tenancies. Through this, tenants experience the impact of working and paying rent through their earned income, as well as the financial planning that this requires, while not trapping them in artificially deflated rents indefinitely.

Staff working in Centrepoin't's Independent Living Programme suggest that Stepping Stone Accommodation has the potential to "change the story for young people experiencing homelessness", and that when young people access Stepping Stone Accommodation they "feel a sense of relief, safety and security" as "if they have been through the supported housing system, having their own key for their own front door is huge for them". In suggesting this, staff highlight that Stepping Stone Accommodation gives young people who would otherwise be unable to access their own independent accommodation, the opportunity to have "their own space and privacy, and really focus on what they want from life".

It is, therefore, important that innovative models of housing are available for young people who are unable to access social or private rented accommodation. As such, the government should target capital funding grants at enabling organisations to buy/rent land which can be developed in to Stepping Stone Accommodation for vulnerable young people.

Conclusion

It is crucial that homeless young people are able to move into social or private rented accommodation in order to transition into independence and develop their lives. It is, therefore, important that the government identifies and addresses relevant barriers, such as the lack of studio and one bedroom properties in England, as well as supports councils to ensure that those who need it are allocated social housing.

Additionally, the private rented sector is unattainable for many homeless young people. Low benefit rates mean that young people frequently cannot afford to rent privately. Meanwhile, those who can, and of course cannot, afford it are also regularly discriminated against by private landlords. As social housing is inaccessible for many homeless young people, it is important that they are supported to afford and access private rented accommodation.

Finally, it is crucial that homeless young people are able to access housing which is suited to their needs. Secure housing allows young people with experiences of homelessness to think in the long term – giving them the opportunity to build connections with their community, progress in their work or education and consider what they want to do with their lives.²⁰ Therefore, we must ensure that vulnerable young people are able to access housing that is secure and suitable so that they are able to develop and thrive.



For Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

- ✓ Incentivise the development of more social homes, with a particular focus on studio and one bedroom homes. Additionally, there should be a focus on developing social homes on brownfield and city centre sites with consideration of access to important amenities for tenants.
- ✓ Ensure the amendment to the Renters (Reform) Bill which outlaws income discrimination is implemented swiftly to ensure that young people in receipt of benefits are able to access the private rented sector. Additionally, the government must ensure that this ban is regulated and landlords are held accountable.
- ✓ Limit the number of months of rent in advance which landlords and letting agents can request; and ban the requirement of guarantors so that young people with limited funds and without access to a guarantor can access private rented accommodation.
- ✓ Target capital funding grants at enabling organisations to buy/rent land which can be developed in to Stepping Stone Accommodation for vulnerable young people.



Department for Work and Pensions

- ✓ Continue to expand the proportion of the housing market available to young people, by keeping LHA rates in line with the 30th percentile of current market rents.

Local authorities

- ✓ Ensure that homeless young people are considered a priority for social housing. Young people who are owed a main housing duty should be allocated to social housing.
- ✓ Ensure that all young people who are facing homelessness get the support they need from local authorities by amending the Homelessness Code of Guidance (HCG) to clarify the obligations of local authorities at the presentation, initial interview, and assessment stages.



Appendix

Table 1. Frequency table displaying urban and rural classification of the 53 local authorities within the sample and the classifications in England.

Urban Rural Classification	Sample	England
Predominantly Rural	14	84
Predominantly Urban	29	175
Urban with Significant Rural	8	50
Total	51	309

References

1. Centrepont (2023) Unaccounted: The scale of youth homelessness in the UK. Available from: <https://centrepont.org.uk/research-reports/unaccounted-scale-youth-homelessness-uk>
2. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022). Statutory homelessness in England: financial year 2021-22. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2021-22>
3. Valuation Office Agency (2023) Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates applicable from April 2023 to March 2024. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-housing-allowance-lha-rates-applicable-from-april-2023-to-march-2024>
4. ONS (2023) Private rental market summary statistics in England. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/privaterentalmarketsummarystatisticsinengland>
5. Centrepont (2023) Youth Homelessness Databank. Available from: <https://centrepont.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/Centrepont%20-%20Youth%20Homelessness%20Databank%202023%20Summary.pdf>
6. Centrepont (2018) Ready to Move On: Barriers to homeless young people accessing longer-term accommodation. Available from: <https://centrepont.org.uk/media/4192/8-ready-to-move-on-barriers-to-homeless-young-people-accessing-longer-term-accommodation.pdf>
7. Centrepont (2018) Ready to Move On: Barriers to homeless young people accessing longer-term accommodation. Available from: <https://centrepont.org.uk/media/4192/8-ready-to-move-on-barriers-to-homeless-young-people-accessing-longer-term-accommodation.pdf>
8. LG Inform. Number of vacant dwellings in the area owned by private registered providers in East Midlands. Available from: https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=24&mod-area=E12000004&mod-group=AllRegions_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup
9. LG Inform. Number of vacant dwellings in the area owned by private registered providers in Yorkshire and Humberside. Available from: https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=24&mod-area=E12000003&mod-group=AllRegions_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup
10. Regulator of Social Housing (2023). Statistics at RSH. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing/about/statistics>
11. Centrepont (2023) Youth Homelessness Databank. Available from: <https://centrepont.org.uk/ending-youth-homelessness/what-youth-homelessness/stats-and-facts>
12. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2023). Table 254: permanent dwellings completed, by house and flat, number of bedroom and tenure, England. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building>
13. LG Inform (2023). Households on waiting list broken down by bedrooms. Available from: https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=%5B339%5D%5B339_Number%5D%5BBedrooms%5D&mod-area=E92000001&mod-group=AllSingleTierAndCountyLainCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup&mod-period=10&mod-groupType=area
14. BBC (2023). Renting: Number of UK homes available down by a third. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-65090846>
15. ONS (2023) Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK: September 2023. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/indexofprivatehousingrentalprices/september2023>
16. HM Treasury (2023) Autumn Statement 2023. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-statement-2023>
17. Autumn Statement 2023 speech (2023). Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/autumn-statement-2023-speech>
18. The Guardian (2023) Bidding wars: inside the super-charged fight for rental properties. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/apr/08/bidding-wars-inside-the-super-charged-fight-for-rental-properties>
19. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023). Government introduces landmark reforms to deliver fairer private rented sector for tenants and landlords. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-introduces-landmark-reforms-to-deliver-fairer-private-rented-sector-for-tenants-and-landlords>
20. Centrepont (2023) Somewhere to Call Home: Improving young people's access to affordable, safe and secure housing. Available from: <https://centrepont.org.uk/media/5753/housing-aspirations-report.pdf>