



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

A study of models of accommodation and support for young single homeless people

Executive Summary

The research

The Welsh Assembly Government commissioned a study of models of accommodation and support for young single homeless people. The objectives of the research were to provide local authorities and their partners with a detailed understanding of:

- the range of models of accommodation that exist in the UK and beyond for young single homeless people aged 16-24
- the relative suitability of each model for various groups
- the effectiveness of each model in terms of outcomes, and
- value for money issues

The research aimed to provide information which will equip local authorities (and others) with the evidence base and strategic framework for planning an appropriate spectrum of provision for young single homeless people in the medium to long term.

The research looked at all young single homeless people, whether referred by local authority homelessness service teams, social services looked-after children teams or young offenders' teams, but placed a particular emphasis on care leavers and young offenders.

Methodology

The research was carried out between October 2006 and May 2007 and involved two stages. The first stage of the research aimed to:

- develop a typology of accommodation and support for young single homeless people
- identify the range of needs presented by this group, including complex multiple needs
- extract relevant information on evidence of the effectiveness of different models of accommodation to be further developed in the second stage of the research

The development of the above outputs was informed by a review of a range of homelessness strategies from within Wales and beyond, a sample of Supporting People Operational Plans and associated needs mapping information and a wide range of other reports and sources including government department reports, research and international literature

The second stage of the research aimed to establish the suitability, effectiveness and value for money of each model identified at the first stage. This was done by:

- considering relevant published evaluations of models of accommodation and support identified during the first stage of the research
- analysis of relevant data, including a sample of 20 Supporting People Revenue Grant annual returns from six organisations specialising in services to young people
- analysis of information available from organisations in England acknowledged as representing good practice in relation to providing effective services to young single homeless people
- undertaking a series of semi-structured telephone interviews with representatives of national stakeholder organisations, homelessness leads, leaving care team manager

and Youth Offending Team manager in 11 Welsh local authorities representing rural, urban and valleys contexts and senior staff within 16 organisations (housing associations and voluntary sector organisations) that provide accommodation and support for young single homeless people in Wales

- carrying out two case studies, following up good practice which had emerged earlier in the research and further examination of international literature. The case studies were undertaken one in an urban area and one in a rural area and involved interviews with senior housing and Supporting People representatives from each local authority, the leaving care manager and the Youth Offending Team manager and a focus group with young single homeless people

Conclusions

Currently, there is significant emphasis on the development of policy for and about young people at UK, England and Wales levels. Youth policy frameworks comprise a combination of universal and targeted approaches, with a greater focus on universal approaches in Wales. Policy development in relation to youth homelessness also has a high profile. More effective provision and use of accommodation and support for young single homeless people will be vital to achieving national policy aims in Wales and associated targets in relation to homelessness.

Needs

The needs of young single homeless people are diverse and dynamic and are not always considered separately from those of all single homeless people. The spectrum of need developed during the research provides information about possible previous living situations and the issues that may require support, both in the first instance and longer-term. Young people can move quickly from one category of need to another.

There are a proportion of young single homeless people who have low needs. As needs become more complex, it is important to tackle issues such as substance misuse, abuse and/or poor mental health as well as life skills. In addition, joint working between agencies becomes more vital, effective risk assessment and risk management are crucial and there is more need for a continuum or spectrum of services within which young people can move. The needs of 16 and 17 year olds can be very different from those aged 18-24. There is a current debate in Wales about whether young people should be found intentionally homeless. There is a case for removal of intentionality providing space for young people to learn from their mistakes without being penalised. However, if other shortcomings in the system in relation to young single homeless people are not addressed, the removal of intentionality for this age group could simply create a revolving door of access into a system which, for those with the most complex needs, does not provide suitable accommodation and support. The removal of intentionality is not a panacea to more effectively tackling youth homelessness in Wales.

Provision

The typology of accommodation and support models available to young single homeless people developed during the research includes the majority of types of provision currently available within the UK. The typology identifies twenty-one types of provision within five categories. The typology provides information on the accommodation itself, the level and nature of support provided, typical referral routes, duration of stay and move on.

There are significant gaps in provision of accommodation and support for young single homeless people in Wales. In particular, provision for young people with complex needs, emergency provision and a lack of prison/secure facilities within Wales. Timing issues can impact on provision for young people being released from prison, (i.e. there may well be suitable accommodation and support, but a space is not available exactly when it is needed).

The profile of services provided in two areas, (one urban and one rural), indicates that location and geographical issues are crucial determinants of how services are provided. What works well in an urban setting may be inappropriate or very difficult to deliver in a rural setting.

In the majority of service types, there is no clear correlation between the model of accommodation and the needs accommodated in the particular service type.

Effectiveness

Young single homeless people need to be offered a range of services in order that provision can be needs-led and that young people can exercise a degree of choice. The need for a range of services for this client group was also a conclusion of research in Scotland that evaluated an individual project for young single homeless people; *'it is but one service which needs to be located within a wider strategic network of services and resources'* (Communities Scotland, 2007).

One of the central findings of this research is that those young people with the lowest needs and highest needs require specific approaches to their accommodation and support needs. The provision of appropriate accommodation and support for those with the highest and lowest needs will enable the young people who fall between these two extremes to more effectively access and have their needs met within existing services. Young people over 18 years of age with low needs may be able to move swiftly through services dependent on availability of sufficient suitable single person accommodation.

Through an analysis of use of existing services and service development trends, we have been able to identify which types of service are most effective in different geographical settings. It is apparent that the effectiveness of existing services in some areas is being negatively impacted upon due to operational issues such as mismatch of needs with services, poor access and assessment processes, capacity and workforce skills, ineffective partnership working and lack of move on accommodation. Currently, there is a lack of agreed mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of different types of accommodation and support for young single homeless people, either in terms of cost effectiveness or outcomes for the young people. It is important to consider the effectiveness of the full range of provision for young single homeless people in any one area as well as of individual projects or schemes.

Recommendations

We recommend that commissioners and providers of accommodation and support services for young single homeless people use the spectrum of need and typology provided in the full report to analyse current provision for this client group in their area.

Further recommendations are set out below under a series of headings.

Ensuring an appropriate range of accommodation and support for young single homeless people

Commissioners and their partners should:

- seek to establish a range of accommodation and support options for young single homeless people in their area. The particular range developed in any area will need to continue to be closely linked to evidence of need collected, (predominantly but not exclusively), by the Supporting People team
- ensure that specific emergency accommodation is developed for young people aged 16 to 18 so that they do not have to be accommodated in an adult hostel environment. This could be a small shared house, core and cluster provision, floating support or a supported lodgings service
- avoid, where at all possible, the development of accommodation-based issue specific services for young people (e.g. services for young people with offending behaviour, mental health problems etc), except where these services are for young people who have experienced abuse and are gender specific. If organisations decide to develop such services, they should be non single site services, (i.e. floating support services)
- ensure that the effectiveness of shared housing for young single homeless people is maximised by not placing an over-reliance on this form of provision. Shared housing is historically viewed as a cornerstone of provision for young people, particularly in urban areas but is most effective when it exists/is developed as part of a range of provision in an area
- consider the development, or extension of, supported lodgings schemes that can be used for very short, emergency type placements (e.g. while assessment processes are undertaken, or mediation carried out) and for longer-term placements as appropriate
- look more creatively at service development options which avoid the need for planning permission, such as using general needs accommodation to provide shared accommodation for young single homeless people with low needs

Addressing gaps in provision

The Welsh Assembly Government should examine existing funding regimes to address current gaps in services, including:

- ensuring that emergency single site facilities, (particularly for young people aged 16-18) can be developed and be financially viable (e.g. via the development of a higher Supporting People Revenue Grant tariff specifically for this purpose or the Welsh Assembly Government expecting social services to support such services for those young people to whom they owe a duty)
- encouraging regional planning and commissioning activity to meet the needs of young people who become homeless and ensuring that such activity is monitored

- promoting the expansion and wider use of supported lodgings schemes (e.g. for emergency placements and for people with high and complex needs) by the development of funding systems (via Supporting People Revenue Grant or social services), which ensure that people who provide such placements can be financially rewarded to a degree that is at least commensurate with amounts paid to foster carers

The Welsh Assembly Government should set up a multi-disciplinary steering group to consider how the needs of young people with the most complex needs can be met. An appendix in the full report sets out an overview of which organisations might be involved in this group and how it might work. In summary, the group should focus on three areas:

- scoping the needs in order to establish an idea of the numbers of young people who fall within this category (an exercise which should be managed nationally but the results set out on a regional basis)
- investigating services that may meet these needs
- overseeing the piloting of, and evaluating, new models of provision, in particular the assertive outreach model

We consider that this recommendation should be part of the 10-year plan to confront homelessness committed to in the **One Wales** document. Concerted and focused action is needed to address the needs of the young homeless people with the most complex needs

Along with providers in their areas, commissioners should develop a higher level of awareness of young people with complex and high needs and develop systems to gather information about the numbers and characteristics and housing journeys of this group. This will require bringing together a range of information and data, including Supporting People and homelessness monitoring information

The Welsh Assembly Government should work with the Welsh Local Government Association to address the difficulties encountered in developing single site provision for young single homeless people. As part of this, consideration should be given to publicising the guidance contained in the report produced by Epona for Newport City Council (and possible further development of the guidance to reflect the current context) (Epona, 2002)

Matching needs and types of provision

Providers and their partners should work together to:

- ensure that homeless young people over 18 are not accommodated in mixed age hostels unless these have robust assessment and risk management processes and where the design of the provision can ensure the safety and well being of young people
- avoid placing people with low and basic needs in hostel or shared provision and instead, where possible use supported lodgings placements and floating support so that they can receive targeted support to develop independent living skills in a community setting

- ensure that the pragmatic use of services where no alternative service is available for a young person informs strategic thinking about the range of provision in the area (i.e. constant use of a service for young people with higher needs than the service is designed to meet would indicate the lack of provision for young people with more complex needs)
- look at ways of using resources that exist amongst specialist providers to input skills (e.g. mental health, substance misuse) into generalist support providers who work with young people

Rural areas

In rural areas, commissioners should:

- ensure that services for young people are less focussed on single site, specifically designed provision and instead develop services that can be flexible and are responsive to need on a geographical level, such as supported lodgings services, floating support and core and cluster provision
- work on a regional basis to develop cross-border services to take advantages of economies of scale in terms of management costs and in recognition of the fact that the movements of young people can easily cross authority borders

Accessing services

The Welsh Assembly Government should develop guidance, and promote good practice, on how the accommodation and support needs of young people defined as children in need are assessed and met at a local level, with the primary aim of local authorities having a continuous relationship with such young people and assessing them under the Children Act rather than under homelessness legislation

Providers should ensure that they have clear eligibility, access and assessment routes that enable services to cater for the needs for which they were intended and to avoid mismatching needs and service type

Access to services for young people with complex needs should be based on detailed assessment including robust risk assessment

Providers and commissioners should ensure that there is provision to undertake detailed assessments of young people with complex needs while they are being appropriately accommodated, (e.g. in supported lodgings, or the SAFE model described in Appendix 4)

Moving on from services

Commissioners and providers should work together to improve the proportion of social lettings made available to young people needing to move on from supported housing

Commissioners and providers should work closely with local authority strategic housing teams to emphasise the need for the development of more single person housing

Commissioners, providers, private sector housing teams and strategic housing teams should work creatively to develop relationships with private sector landlords to enable

more effective access to the private rented sector for young people where this is appropriate

Providers should work to minimise the barriers to move on for young people, e.g. looking at the use of appropriate occupancy agreements and working in partnership

Monitoring and evaluating services

The Welsh Assembly Government should facilitate the establishment of a comprehensive and robust system of evaluation of the effectiveness of the different forms of accommodation and support provided for young single homeless people and ensure that regulatory regimes address this issue. Such a system will need to have direct reference to clearly stated national objectives and take account of outcomes for young people and value for money. In doing this, the Welsh Assembly Government should draw on the experience of organisations such as Cymorth Cymru and support providers that have developed their own systems of monitoring outcomes

At a local level, information about the effectiveness of support and accommodation services to young single homeless people in relation to both value for money and outcomes achieved should inform commissioning decisions

An appendix in the full report sets out more detail on monitoring and evaluating services.

Further research

This research has identified two areas which are worthy of further exploration:

- examining the links between care leavers and prostitution in Wales to establish an understanding of the support and housing needs of this group and effective interventions to address this issue
- scoping the use of prison services and secure settings for young people in Wales to establish recommendations and guidance as to how the accommodation and support needs of this group can be effectively met based on achieving their integration back into mainstream society. Such research should seek to assess the impact on young people of secure placements outside of Wales and consider whether it is necessary to establish more Wales-based facilities