Making homeless young people count: The scale of youth homelessness in the UK
Thank you to all the local authorities in England who provided data in response to Centrepoint’s Freedom of Information Request on youth homelessness. Thanks also to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Scottish Housing and Social Justice Directorate and the Welsh Knowledge and Analytical Services.

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Introduction to Centrepoint’s Youth Homelessness Databank

The Government does not currently publish national data illustrating how many young people seek help as they are homeless in the UK. Without this information, locally and nationally, it is not possible to devise effective policy and guidance that will end youth homelessness.

Centrepoint’s Youth Homelessness Databank increases the data available on youth homelessness by gathering information at a local level to reveal the national picture. Crucially, this includes the number of young people who ask their local authority for help because they are homeless or at risk.

All data collected by Centrepoint is available through an online, open-access dashboard, at www.yhdatabank.com which holds data on youth homelessness across all local authorities in the UK. This provides the only single point of access to information on youth homelessness in the UK.

This year over 90 per cent of local authorities in England provided their youth homelessness data through Freedom of Information requests. This high response rate means we are able to provide the most comprehensive picture of youth homelessness to date. Data for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales was obtained directly from their respective departments.

The data collected includes the number of young people who:

- presented to their council as they are homeless or at risk
- assessed under the Housing Act 1996
- accepted as statutorily homeless and owed a housing duty by their council
- given prevention and/or relief support

Data was also collected on the reasons for young people leaving their last settled base.

This data is more extensive than central government data publications on youth homelessness, which include only young people who were accepted as statutorily homeless and received a housing duty. That is only those who are eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. As such, government data under-represents the true scale of youth homelessness in England. The Youth Homelessness Databank hopes to reframe the conversation on youth homelessness from those receiving support, to all those in need.

It is important that data is available that represents young people specifically as 16 to 24 year olds face unique circumstances, both leading to their homelessness and with respect to opportunities for prevention and relief. For example, many young people will have had to leave their home for the first time when they reach out to their council. Mediation with the family is often the first response by councils and additional support can be needed to help them to maintain their own accommodation for the first time. Further, young people face particularly adverse circumstances when it comes to employment and welfare, which can have an effect on their ability to manage and maintain a tenancy. Young people renting in the private sector, for instance, are entitled only to the Shared Accommodation Rate of the Local Housing Allowance through Housing Benefit, as opposed to the single room rate, meaning that their options are more limited than for older people facing homelessness. It is therefore essential that the needs of young people are specifically considered in any discussion on homelessness.

This report centres on findings from Centrepoint’s analysis of data collected for the 2017/18 Youth Homelessness Databank. It updates findings from previous years, including Centrepoint’s estimate of the national scale of youth homelessness. Where possible, comparisons are made between 2016/17 and 2017/18 findings to understand youth homelessness over the past two years. The research also focuses mainly on findings in England; however data from the devolved nations is included where possible.

Key findings

1. Centrepoint estimates that 103,000 young people in the UK presented to their council in 2017/18 as they were homeless or at risk. These young people are in crisis and often have nowhere else to turn beyond their local authority.

2. Of those young people who approached their council for help, less than half (48 per cent) received meaningful support to help prevent or relieve their homelessness (including those receiving a full housing duty). This is an increase from 42 per cent in 2016/17, driven by an increase in the prevention and relief provision for those who were not accepted as statutorily homeless.

3. The biggest reason for becoming homeless continued to be parents or others asking them to leave (at 37 per cent and 15 per cent respectively).
Policy Landscape

England

During 2017/18, councils in England had a duty to house any young person who was eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. Young people who presented to their council but did not meet these criteria may have been given support to prevent or relieve their homelessness through a non-statutory support pathway including advice, mediation and financial assistance. Councils, however, did not have to offer this support and as such many young people left the council with little or no help.

On 3rd April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force and changed the support model for councils in England. This legislates for prevention and relief support by adding this as an additional tier of statutory support regardless of priority need or intentionality. Only if this prevention and relief is unsuccessful are young people then assessed to determine if they are owed a full housing duty.

The journey map below outlines the differences in the pathway a young person takes through the council pre- and post- Homelessness Reduction Act.

A young person’s interaction with the council before the HRA

A young person’s interaction with the council after the HRA

This report contains the most recent annual data available (for the financial year 2017/18) and it should be reiterated that this was before the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Therefore the report is not an assessment of the Act; instead it is a reflection of the scale of youth homelessness and the work of councils ahead of its enactment.
The Devolved Nations

The responsibility for tackling homelessness is devolved and councils across each of the nations have different duties to those who approach them for help.

In Wales, the Wales (Housing) Act 2014 led with a shift towards prevention and relief work before any full housing duty. All young people who present to their council in Wales should be assessed and provided with prevention or relief support, informed by their circumstances. A full housing duty is then only owed to those in priority need in the event that this support is not successful.

In Northern Ireland, much like in England prior to the Homelessness Reduction Act, young people who are eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need are owed a duty to help them secure accommodation. However, this responsibility lies with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), as opposed to local authorities. Further, eligibility criteria are more complex in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK, as prior behaviour as well as immigration status are considered. For anyone who is not owed a housing duty, the NIHE has a duty only to provide advice, though often additional prevention and relief work is carried out.

Scottish homelessness policy operates on a different model, weighted towards providing a full housing duty over prevention and relief. The abolition of priority need on 31st December 2012 means that all eligible and unintentionally homeless young people are now owed a housing duty from their council. This focus means that in 2017/18, 92 per cent of young people presenting to the council were owed support as they were unintentionally homeless and a further four per cent as they were unintentionally at risk of homelessness.

The scale of youth homelessness: presentations

Presenting to the council

There is no official definition or measurement of the scale of youth homelessness in the UK. Centrepoint’s estimate is through the lens of those who have sought help from the council.

Centrepoint’s estimate reflects high youth homelessness figures across all parts of England. In both rural and urban local authorities the scale of youth homelessness can represent an alarmingly high percentage of the youth population as a whole. For example, in North Devon the number of young people presenting to their council represents 6 per cent of the total population of 16 to 24 year olds, the highest proportion of young people in need in the country. On average, the number of young people presenting to their council for help represents over 1 per cent of the total youth population.

Centrepoint estimates that in 2017/18, 103,000 young people in the UK approached their council for help as they were homeless or at risk of homelessness. Of these, 84,000 were seeking help in England.
Change in youth homelessness over time

From 2016/17 to 2017/18 there was a two per cent decrease in the number of young people presenting to English local authorities as homeless or at risk.\(^iv\)

This overall decrease is driven by a three per cent decrease across urban local authorities, concentrated in a few key areas where homelessness presentations have notably decreased from 2016/17.\(^v\) For example, in Bedford, 570 presentations in 2016/17 fell to 257 in 2017/18, and in Wolverhampton presentations fell from 889 in 2016/17 to 674 in 2017/18.

Local authorities reporting a large decline in the number of young people approaching them for help often cited early intervention work and collaboration with other youth specific organisations as having contributed to this decrease.

However, while youth homelessness in urban areas has decreased, this trend has not been mirrored in rural areas. Across rural or mostly rural local authorities with comparable data, the number of young people who presented to their council as they were homeless or at risk rose by two per cent from 2016/17 to 2017/18. This is at odds with the trend across urban areas and highlights the growing issue of rural homelessness as a specific concern.

Again, this was driven by a pattern concentrated in a small number of local authorities. In 14 per cent of rural councils, youth homelessness increased by at least 50 per cent. This included, for example, Wealden where the number of young people approaching their council for help rose from 125 to 223 from 2016/17 to 2017/18.

With the majority of focus and funding for homelessness services concentrated in urban areas, it may be that some rural local authorities have not been able to mirror the early intervention and collaborative processes that have yielded results in some more densely populated areas.

Whilst a direct comparison across local authorities that responded in both 2016/17 and 2017/18 leads to the conclusion that there has been little change in the scale of youth homelessness over these two years, this year’s national estimate is indeed far higher than last year. This increase in the national estimate from 86,000 to 103,000 young people presenting to their council is a reflection of an improved breadth of data and quality assurance, as opposed to an actual increase in need. The 2016/17 estimate, therefore, was an underestimate of the scale of youth homelessness, and youth homelessness is in fact more wide spread than initially anticipated.

The scale of youth homelessness: Assessments, prevention and relief and housing duties

The Youth Homelessness Databank provides a unique insight into the actions taken to prevent and relieve homelessness before this became a duty in April 2018. Centrepoint’s findings show that the majority of young people in 2017/18 left their interaction with the council without meaningful support.

Across the provision of all types of support, 52 per cent of young people seeking help from their council left with neither an acceptance nor any other documented prevention and relief support.
Assessments

For the vast majority of young people seeking help in 2017/18, their needs were not fully evaluated through a formal assessment and so may not have been factored in to their support plan. Furthermore, as acceptances follow on from an assessment, there is a concern that there may be young people in priority need within the 65 per cent who are not assessed.

This could mean there are a number of young people not receiving the housing they are owed.

The Homelessness Reduction Act legislates to correct for this as councils will now have to assess all young people who present to them. This means that there will be a steep rise in the number of young people assessed. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) estimates that each assessment takes two hours, so additional resource provisions will be essential. In 2017/8, the 12 months before the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, only 1 in 6 councils (16 per cent) were already assessing everyone who presented to them.

Acceptances

In 2017/18, councils had a duty to house only those who were accepted as statutorily homeless. This means those young people who were assessed to be unintentionally homeless, eligible and in priority need.

MHCLG publish data on the number of young people accepted as statutorily homeless annually. In 2017/18, MHCLG shows that 12,410 young people were accepted as statutorily homeless. This is a minority of the young people Centrepoint estimates sought help from their council across the councils in England.

Prevention and relief

For those who were not accepted as statutorily homeless, many councils offered support in 2017/18 beyond their full housing duties. This is referred to as prevention and relief support.

As with the provision of assessments, following the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act, all eligible young people will now be owed prevention and relief support, regardless of priority need. Again a large increase in service provision is needed to deliver support to the 65 per cent of young people who presented but where no action was taken to prevent or relieve their homelessness last year.
Funding the Homelessness Reduction Act

The increase in provision of prevention and relief support will likely be the largest financial undertaking for the Homelessness Reduction Act, with MHCLG estimating that each prevention and relief case costs on average £530. Furthermore, assessments are estimated to cost an additional £44 each.

All councils in England have been allocated a new burdens fund to help them to deliver these new duties to people of all ages facing homelessness. Nationally, this provided councils with £25 million in 2017/18 to enable the enactment of the new duties. Roughly equivalent funding has also been allocated across 2018/19 and 2019/20.

However, for those councils that provided full and usable data to the Youth Homelessness Databank, over half (56 per cent) did not receive enough funding in 2017/18 to increase assessments and prevention and relief cases from levels in 2017/18 to all young people who present. Across these councils, 192 per cent more funding is needed to deliver the additional services. In absolute terms this adds up to over £10 million.

This analysis considers only those aged 16 to 24 years old, whilst the allocated funding provided by MHCLG is required to cover all ages. This further adds to concerns that councils have not been sufficiently resourced to manage the increased caseload with the Homelessness Reduction Act.

In order to fulfil these new duties it is essential that councils are adequately resourced and that resources are allocated based on evidence of demand and need.

Reasons for homelessness

Individual reasons for homelessness

Centrepoint’s Freedom of Information request also collects data on the main reason given for young people having to leave their last settled base. In 2017/18, 75 per cent of all councils in England responded with this information.

At an individual level, the reasons for homelessness have remained consistent with 2016/17. This includes parents no longer willing to accommodate a young person remaining as the most commonly noted reason, at 37 per cent.

This was followed by others no longer willing to accommodate a young person (15 per cent) and the loss of rented accommodation due to termination of assured shorthold tenancy or some other reason (12 per cent).

Reasons given to local authority for young people leaving last settled base.

- Parents no longer willing to accommodate: 37%
- Others no longer willing to accommodate: 15%
- Loss of rented accommodation due to termination or another reason: 12%
- Violent breakdown of relationship with partner: 9%
- Left local authority care, prison, hospital or other institution: 6%
- Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner: 6%
- Violence or harassment: 5%
- Rent or mortgage arrears: 4%
- Another reason: 7%
The data includes reasons for homelessness for a combination of young people who presented to their council and young people who were accepted as statutorily homeless by their council, depending on what data was available locally. When looking at the reasons for homelessness cited specifically for those who were accepted as statutorily homeless (as opposed to all those young people who presented) the data reflects the criteria for priority need. For example, whilst 32 per cent of young people who presented did so because their parents were no longer willing to accommodate them, this rose to 38 per cent amongst those who were accepted as statutorily homeless. This suggests that young people who have been asked to leave by their parents are particularly vulnerable and more likely to be accepted as in priority need or unintentionally homeless.

Similarly, six per cent of presenting young people were homeless or at risk because of a violent relationship breakdown, compared to ten per cent of all those accepted as statutorily homeless and therefore in priority need. This rise is expected, given that victims of domestic violence should receive priority need status.

A further eight per cent of young people presented due to the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. Though not a priority need qualification in its own right, this figure rose to 11 per cent amongst those accepted as statutorily homeless. This may be a reflection of wider concerns around precarious tenancies. The eviction of assured shorthold tenants is the main cause of homelessness for all ages in the UK and accounted for 78 per cent of the overall rise in homelessness in England since 2011. The disproportionate representation amongst young people who are accepted as statutorily homeless indicates that the most vulnerable young people are also at risk of being affected by adverse tenancy agreements.

**Local authority level factors**

Much of the evidence examining the predictors of homelessness, both youth and all age, considers both individual (including personal circumstances, as discussed above) and structural (including, for example, the wider housing and labour market) causes of homelessness. It is widely agreed that the route into homelessness is a complex combination of both types of contributing factor. Centrepoint’s estimate tested different local authority level characteristics to understand the scale of youth homelessness. Four variables were found to have a statistically significant relationship with the scale of youth homelessness and were used to understand the national picture. This provides a statistical insight into the relationships between homelessness and wider structural factors. The following relationships were found to be statistically significant, and used for the estimate of youth homelessness:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>A 1% increase in...</th>
<th>contributed to a...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the proportion of children in low income families</td>
<td>0.65% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apprentice starts</td>
<td>0.74% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>house affordability</td>
<td>0.82% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deaths due to drugs misuse</td>
<td>0.36% increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This means that an ‘average’ area which had the average number of apprentices (473), deaths due to drug misuse (22), the average house affordability measure (house prices at 8.7 times income) and the average rate of children in low income families (15 per cent) would have an estimated 282 young people presenting to their council.

More details on this modelling can be found in the Methodological Appendix.
These results add statistical context to extensive research on the relationships between access to housing, income levels and poverty in childhood on occurrences of homelessness. However, it should be noted that though they inform the estimate, it is not possible from this alone to infer any causation, in either direction. For example, we cannot conclusively say that an increase in these factors would cause an increase in the number of young people approaching their council and instead we recommend further research in this area.

Relationships were also found in 2016/17 Youth Homelessness Databank research between the number of young people presenting and the percentage of children in low income families, number of apprentice starts and house affordability, further adding weight to the relationship determined this year. The number of deaths due to drugs misuse was not tested in last year’s analysis.

Looking ahead: Data and the Databank under the Homelessness Reduction Act

The limited nature of MHCLG data collection and publication prior to the Homelessness Reduction Act has historically set a precedent for similarly limited data collection at the local level.

The Homelessness Reduction Act seeks to plug these data shortcomings by moving to case level data which maps a young person’s entire interaction with the council from presentation through to prevention, relief and acceptance as statutorily homeless. This new data collection (to be reported through a new form called H-CLIC) is welcomed by Centrepoint as it has the potential to create a central, uniform hub of information that can be analysed to inform wider policy.

For the data collected to be useful, and utilised, it is important that councils are given the necessary resource to acquire and provide training on software that can allow for the new data collection requirements. Centrepoint’s experience of collecting data through Freedom of Information requests highlights some of the strains felt by councils in terms of delivering support with homelessness and collecting related data. Many local authorities reported anecdotally that the transition to this new software had been slow or had not happened at all by the time Centrepoint closed its data collection period in September, five months after the new requirements had come into effect.
In total, 17 local authorities (5 per cent) cited new systems as the reason that not all of the requested data could be returned, causing concerns that the ability to understand the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act may be hampered as historic data falls out of reach. A further five local authorities also noted that whilst the data was still held in the new systems, it could only be retrieved manually and that this would exceed the 18 hours allocated to each Freedom of Information request. The move to case level data collection under the Homelessness Reduction Act will prove a large undertaking and culture change for councils. It is therefore essential that the systems successfully aide the ability of councils to access and analyse data.

Looking ahead to the 2018/19 Youth Homelessness Databank, our data will allow for a unique assessment of the extent to which councils are able to fulfil their new duties. Further, in areas where it was possible for the council to respond to Centrepoint’s Freedom of Information request this year, it is hoped that the data will provide a baseline for the scale of youth homelessness in the UK, from which an assessment of the impact of the new legislation on the number of young people seeking and receiving help can be made.
3. MHCLG should ensure data published following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act includes youth specific statistics and data on the scale of youth homelessness based on those in need, not just those receiving support.

The new H-CLIC data returns provide an opportunity to review government’s publication of homelessness statistics. Data published should include specific data on youth homelessness to ensure that the needs of this group can be effectively addressed. Furthermore, published data needs to reflect demand for homelessness services in local authorities as well as support subsequently offered and outcomes, so that there is transparency in how effective the Homelessness Reduction Act has been. This would also allow for the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act on youth homelessness to be evaluated.

4. Local authorities should publish Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies informed by data on the scale and causes of homelessness in their area.

With central government committing to reviewing the effectiveness and accountability of homelessness strategies, councils have the opportunity to frame their strategies around evidence. The Youth Homelessness Databank shows that the majority of councils have information at their disposal on youth homelessness, and those that don’t already should do with the new Homelessness Reduction Act data duties. This data should also be referenced in their progress reporting on the delivery of the strategy.

5. The government should commission a cross-departmental review of rural homelessness, as part of its review of the impact of Homelessness Reduction Act.

The data collected for the Youth Homelessness Reduction Act suggests that rural youth homelessness is a growing concern. There is limited public information on the scale and nature of youth homelessness in rural areas and the Homelessness Reduction Act provides an opportunity to create an evidence base.
Appendix: methodology

Homelessness policy in the UK is devolved to the individual nations and, as such, each has independent policies, which inform differing data collection processes. England collects the most limited data on youth homelessness centrally. Therefore data for the Youth Homelessness Databank is collected from local authorities in England and from central housing teams in the three devolved nations.

This year a record number of English councils responded to Centrepoint’s Freedom of Information request, helping to create the most complete picture to date on the scale of youth homelessness and the nature of support. However, in a continuing trend from last year, though data on acceptances is collected in all local authorities for reporting to MHCLG, not all were able to respond to this element of the request.

Some local authorities were not able to provide data on the number of 16 to 17 year olds approaching them for help. This was in cases where these young people were supported by Children’s Services, but the council were only able to direct the Freedom of Information request to the housing department.

The table below shows the response rates across each question in the Freedom of Information request in England. In total there are 326 local authorities in England.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of local authorities</th>
<th>Data provided</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>91%</td>
<td>responded any part of the Freedom of Information request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79%</td>
<td>young people presenting as homeless or at risk to their local authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82%</td>
<td>young people assessed by the local authority under the Housing Act 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88%</td>
<td>young people accepted as statutorily homeless by the local authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td>young people provided with prevention and relief support from the local authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>68%</td>
<td>Responded to all parts of the Freedom of Information request</td>
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Estimating the scale of youth homelessness

Centrepoint’s annual estimate of the scale of youth homelessness in the UK is based on responses to the Freedom of Information request query about the number of young people presenting to each local authority in England as they were homeless or at risk, in addition to the same measure across the devolved nations. A data quality audit was carried out on each local authority that provided data.

A selection of variables related to homelessness, including house prices and access, benefit uptake, poverty indicators and education measures, were used to create a prediction model for the councils with known and verified presenting figures. The final model included four prediction variables at a local authority level: house affordability, proportion of children in low income families, number of apprenticeship starts and deaths due to drugs misuse.

This model was then run on those local authorities who had not provided a (valid) presenting figure in response to Centrepoint’s Freedom of Information request. The final estimate of the scale of youth homelessness in England was calculated by summing the known presenting figures in local authorities that responded to the request with usable data, and the estimated presenting figure for those local authorities that did not.

For the UK wide estimate of youth homelessness, the England figure was added to the total number of young people presenting in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This data was obtained from central sources in each of the nations.

In Northern Ireland, a slightly different reporting structure means that the data represents all young people aged 16-25 years old, as opposed to the age band of 16-24 years old used throughout the rest of this research.

More details on this calculation can be found in the accompanying Technical Appendix, published alongside this report.

Calculating support given to young people in England

The data collected for the Youth Homelessness Databank helps to map the journey each young person takes through the council. By looking at councils who responded to all four elements of the Freedom of Information request, with data that was consistent with Centrepoint’s definitions, it was possible to map the proportion of young people receiving different levels of support. This calculation was based on data from 205 local authorities (63 per cent).
End notes

i. Acceptance rates in Scotland are published here: http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/adhoc-analysis/YouthHomelessness1718

ii. Population estimates according to ONS calculations by age for 2017 can be found at www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates

iii. Figure based upon the data for 255 local authorities providing data on the number of young people presenting to their local authority as they were homeless or at risk

iv. This figure is from the 175 local authorities that were able to provide comparable data from 2016/7 to 2017/8.

v. The 2011 Rural-Urban classification of local authorities was used to classify each into one of the following: Largely Rural, Mainly Rural, Urban with City and Town, Urban with Major Conurbation, Urban with Minor Conurbation, Urban with Significant Rural. The full classification can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification-of-local-authority-and-other-higher-level-geographies-for-statistical-purposes

vi. Details on the approximate cost of homelessness assessments and prevention and relief activities as well as the methodology for calculating the new burdens funding can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-reduction-act-new-burdens-funding

vii. https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/eviction_from_a_private_tenancy_accounts_for_78_of_the_rise_in_homelessness_since_2011


ix. House Affordability statistics can be found at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/ratioofhousepricesoverresidentebasedearningslowerquartileandmedian

x. Data on children in low income families can be found via PHE’s interactive data tool at https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/wider-determinants/data#page/9/gid/1938133045/par/6/par/E12000004/ati/102/are/E06000015/iid/11401/age/1/sex/4

xi. Data on apprenticeships across the UK can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships

xii. Data on deaths due to drugs misuse, and further information on the definitions and methodology used to calculate the estimates can be found at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/drugusedeathsbylocalauthority