

Research report

Beyond a number:

The scale of youth homelessness in the UK



Youth
Homelessness
Databank



give homeless
young people
a future

Glossary

Young person – the young people referenced in this report are aged 16 to 24 years old. This includes young people who are single, in a couple, and those with dependent children.

Personal housing plan – if a young person is assessed as homeless or at risk of homelessness a personal housing plan must be put in place based on their needs, outlining the steps to be taken to prevent or relieve homelessness.

Intentionally homeless – young people may be deemed intentionally homeless if the council asserts they could have prevented their homelessness.

Everyone In – a scheme launched by the Government on 26 March 2020 which asked local authorities in England to “help make sure we get everyone in”, including those who would not normally be entitled to assistance under homelessness legislation. In response, local authorities across the country sought to ensure that people sleeping rough and in accommodation where it was difficult to self-isolate (such as shelters and assessment centres) were safely accommodated to protect them, and the wider public, from the risks of Covid-19.

Statutorily homeless – a young person in England is considered to be statutorily homeless and owed a housing duty if they are eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

Presentations – a young person who has presented to their local authority as they were homeless or at risk of homelessness. They may also be referred to as young people approaching or seeking help from their council.

Initial assessment – an initial assessment under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to determine if the young person is owed a prevention or relief duty.

Ineligible – a minority of young people are ineligible for housing assistance for reasons such as having no recourse to public funds.

Homeless

At risk

Prevention duty – owed to any young person assessed as being at risk of homelessness within at least 56 days. The council must take steps to help them maintain their current accommodation or secure alternative accommodation.

Positive outcome – homelessness prevented

Relief duty – owed to any young person assessed as homeless. The duty lasts at least 56 days, within which the council must help them to secure alternative accommodation for at least 6 months.

Duty ends – not housed

Positive outcome – homelessness relieved

Not priority need

Duty ends – not housed

Main duty assessment – a young person has been given a main duty assessment if, after the end of a relief duty, they were assessed under the Housing Act 1996 to determine if they are owed a main duty.

Main housing duty – any young person in receipt of a main duty is owed suitable temporary or permanent accommodation. This is an ongoing duty for as long as the young person is eligible.

Priority need – priority need varies across the nations. Broadly, this includes all 16 and 17 year olds, pregnant women and households with dependent children. It also includes other groups if the local authority is satisfied they are vulnerable, such as care leavers or those with a health problem. Priority need has been abolished in Scotland.

Positive outcome – housed

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Thank you to all the local authorities in England who provided data in response to Centrepoin's Freedom of Information Request on youth homelessness, and to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Scottish Housing and Social Justice Directorate, and the Housing Statistics team at the Welsh Government, especially so in the light of COVID-19 and the pressures around the pandemic. Thanks also goes to the partnering charities including New Horizon Youth Centre, Youth Concern, Impact Initiatives, and Mary Seacole, and also the local authorities that spoke with us as part of the research process. Thanks to those Centrepoin Helpline staff who were interviewed as part of this research.

Author: Daniel Poursaedi

Centrepoin, 2022

Executive Summary

People who face homelessness when they are young are among the most vulnerable in our society. At a critical moment in their lives, effective support from councils and their partners can help the young person to find a stable home and a job. If this opportunity is missed, homelessness can rob them of their chance of a successful transition to adulthood, leaving some to spiral into a lifetime of exclusion.

The Youth Homelessness Databank tracks the number of young people approaching local authority homelessness teams across the UK. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland this data is sourced from the devolved governments, but in England the data is collected through FOI requests to individual local authorities as there is less data available broken down by age at the national level.

For the fifth year in a row, the number of young people who asked for help from their local council because they were homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness has increased.

Centrepoint estimates that in 2020/21, almost 122,000 young people in the UK approached their council for help as they were homeless or at risk.

This year's data reveals the scale of youth homelessness during the first year of the pandemic, so the increase is particularly concerning given that significant measures that were put in place during this period to limit the number of people experiencing homelessness. These included the eviction ban, the temporary uplift in Universal Credit and the Everyone In scheme.

Insight from the Centrepoint Helpline and interviews with staff from youth homelessness charities across the UK suggests that this increase was in part driven by the pressures of the lockdowns:

“We saw a lot of people getting furloughed, loss of income, but also pressure cooker environments: not being able to leave home. So that exacerbated any family tensions, and not being able to sofa-surf, which is what so many of our young people end up doing.”

Centrepoint Helpline staff member

The quantitative data from local authorities in England showed that these circumstances were widespread. The percentage of young people who were **homeless or at risk of homelessness because their family were no longer willing or able to accommodate them increased** from 45% in 2019/20 to 49% in 2020/21. The data also suggested that **domestic violence** was an increased driver of youth homelessness, rising **from 7.9% to 9.3%** between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

In England the government publishes a Code of Guidance that sets out expectations for local councils in dealing with homelessness. This 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. Unfortunately, as in previous years, our data suggests that many of those who ask their local council for help do not receive the support they need, with many not even receiving a full assessment. Centrepoint data suggest that in **England only 66% of young people presenting to their local authority had a full assessment.** The proportion of young people receiving an assessment appears to have fallen significantly over time, from 79% in 2018/19.

Interviews with local authorities and frontline agencies suggested that the additional pressures of the pandemic may have contributed to this decline. When the pandemic arrived, housing options teams had to quickly change their working practices, with most closing their face-to-face offices and moving solely to online and phone support. Nearly every council we spoke with in the research process spoke of how they had experienced workforce difficulties as a result of the pandemic, including high levels of staff absences during this period.

Following an assessment, local authorities have a duty to try to prevent or resolve the person's homelessness by helping them to access accommodation. Some young people may also be owed a “full duty” if they fit specific criteria, and then the council has to secure accommodation for them. Our data shows that, as in previous years, the proportion of young people recorded as having a positive outcome after presenting as homeless or at risk is also worryingly low. **In 2020/21, only 37% of those who presented had a positive outcome,** meaning their homelessness was successfully prevented or relieved, or they were housed under the main housing duty. This is broadly in line with previous years (34% had a positive outcome in 2018/29, followed by 38% in 2019/20.) This suggests that in England the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) process is failing to address the housing needs of six in ten young people who present as homeless or at risk.

The Youth Homelessness Databank highlights how important it is to have robust data to understand the scale and nature of youth homelessness. At present, in England, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) does not publish age breakdowns for all stages of the HRA process – only those accepted as being owed a prevention or relief duty. This means that the government is unable to properly examine the scale and nature of youth homelessness and how these trends vary across the country and therefore is less likely to be able to develop solutions to tackling youth homelessness.

The big discrepancy between the number of young people presenting as homeless and those being assessed demands urgent attention from government and local authorities. We therefore strongly urge the Westminster and devolved governments to begin collecting presentation and/or initial interview figures from local authorities to understand the true scale of demand arriving at local authorities' doors. Without this, the government is restricting its field of vision and therefore failing to address the full scale of how many young people face homelessness in the UK.



Recommendations:

At a national level:

1. The government should create a new cross-departmental strategy to end youth homelessness. This should ensure that there is a youth-specific emergency housing offer in every local authority so that young people facing homelessness can access age-appropriate accommodation up to the age of 25.

2. To assist councils in carrying out their duties under the HRA, central government should reach a multiple-year financial settlement through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (rather than single year settlements as have been allocated in recent years) and confirm the allocation of this so that local authorities can plan provisions accordingly. This should be calculated in line with demand in each local authority area. A longer-term Homelessness Reduction Grant funding settlement would allow councils to take a more strategic approach to the commissioning of local homelessness provision.

In both England and the devolved nations:

3. The government should require local authorities to report the number of homelessness presentations to give a fuller picture of levels of demand among young people (and older groups). In England, this should be added as a new required field on HCLIC (the system used to record data related to the HRA). This would give a more accurate reflection of the number of people seeking help from local authorities, as our analysis has shown that a significant proportion of presentations do not reach the formal assessment stage.

In England, we call on the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities to:

4. Make publicly available all HCLIC data broken by age to enable the government and those working in the homelessness sector to better understand how effectively the HRA is supporting young people. In the longer-term, we encourage the Department to make all HCLIC data searchable via an online tool (similar to the Stat-Xplore tool used for the Department for Work and Pensions data) which would enable more detailed analysis of trends in youth homelessness. For example, it would allow for analysis of differences between subgroups of young people (including different genders, ethnicities etc). This analysis would help ensure that funding and commissioning of services were more closely linked to needs and outcomes.

5. To ensure that all young people who are facing homelessness get the support they need from local authorities, the Homelessness Code of Guidance should be amended to clarify the obligations of local authorities at the presentation, initial interview, and assessment stage to ensure that all local authorities are aware of what is and is not acceptable practice. In doing this they should make clear what factors a local authority should take into account and what constitutes a realistic burden of proof when the HRA states that a local authority must only have “reason to believe” a person is homeless or at risk to get an assessment. This should cover what forms of evidence or burden of proof is acceptable to require at this early stage of the HRA.

6. Following this amending of the Homelessness Code of Guidance, the government should review local delivery of the HRA and adherence to the Homelessness Code of Guidance to ensure the intentions of the Act are made a reality across the country. This should include a review of the timing of support to ensure that young people get an initial interview and assessment in line with the urgency required by their situation. Where local authorities are not fully carrying out their statutory duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act, DLUHC should work closely with them to address problems and support them to improve systems where required.

Local authorities should:

7. Engage with relevant local agencies, including local education providers and third sector agencies, to ensure that all local stakeholders working with young people know how to refer them for homelessness support (even if they do not have a legal duty to refer).

8. Consistently adopt models of best practice in supporting young people, particularly by having a youth-specific homelessness prevention and relief service (or specialist worker in smaller authorities). This could be delivered in-house or in partnership with the voluntary sector, but must be focused on tailoring the service to the distinct needs of young people facing homelessness.



Introduction

The Centrepoint Youth Homelessness Databank is the only publicly accessible resource that provides information across the entire Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) pathway. By collecting data on the number of young people at every stage of their application at district and unitary council level we are able to build a more informed national picture. Without this knowledge we cannot know how best to tackle youth homelessness, nor ensure sufficient funding is allocated so that young people and the services that help them receive the support they need.

This report presents an analysis of data collected by local authorities in 2020/21, and looks into how the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) has developed in the third year since its introduction.

Local authorities provided data on the number of 16 to 24 year olds who applied to them for help because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness, and then their subsequent journey through local authority support. This report also updates the previous year's findings, including Centrepoint's estimate of the national scale of youth homelessness. The report is mainly focused on available data collected by councils in England; however, data from the devolved nations is included whenever possible.

Centrepoint's estimate is only able to take into consideration those young people who have sought help from their local authority. It is not currently possible to accurately gauge the scale of hidden homelessness amongst young people who have not approached their council for support.

It is important to stress that the factors that affect youth homelessness go beyond the homelessness support provided by councils. They also include limited and inappropriate housing stock, scarce and insecure employment opportunities, welfare entitlements which do not meet living costs and many other social and personal factors. If we are to succeed in ending youth homelessness, the proactive, preventative approach enshrined in the HRA must be extended to other services working with those at risk of homelessness.

Visit www.centrepoint.org.uk/databank to explore the data discussed in this report. The databank includes data from individual local authorities, as well as regional and national data, providing the only single point of access to the most complete source of information on youth homelessness in the UK.



Methodology

Due to differing legislation in the devolved nations, the data collected and published varies significantly between each nation. Data for Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales was obtained from their respective central government departments. English data was obtained through Freedom of Information requests to relevant

local authorities and 84 per cent of these provided data. The good response rate from English local authorities, alongside data from the other three nations allows us to provide a picture of the number of young people presenting to their local authority because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The FOI request sent to English local authorities requested data on the number of young people who¹:

- **presented to their council as they are homeless or at risk**
- **were assessed for a prevention or relief duty under the HRA**
- **received an initial assessment of being owed a prevention duty**
- **received an initial assessment of being owed a relief duty**
- **had a successful prevention duty outcome**
- **had a prevention duty end leading to a relief duty**
- **had a prevention duty end for any other reason**
- **had a relief duty end successfully**
- **had a relief duty end and lead to main duty assessment**
- **had a relief duty end for any other reason**
- **were assessed under the Housing Act 1996**
- **were accepted as statutorily homeless and owed a housing duty by their council**
- **were helped through 'Everyone In'**

This data provides a more extensive picture of youth homelessness than Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) statutory homelessness data sources which only provide a 16-24 age group break down for those who are owed either a prevention or relief duty combined. Whilst that is an improvement in available government data on youth homelessness, it does little to demystify the journey that young people take through the homelessness system.

The responses to Centrepoin's Freedom of Information request show an increase in the number of responses where the council was able to provide the requested data. Last year, 76 per cent of local authorities were able to give any of the requested data for April 2019 to the end of March 2020, whereas this year 84 per cent provided the requested data for the period of April 2020 to the end of March 2021. Whilst this improvement in the data response rate is welcomed, it is still not as high as the data response rate for April 2018 to the end of March 2019, for which 95 per cent of local authorities were able to provide some or any of the requested data. Many of the councils that were unable to provide data cited the increased demand on councils placed on them by COVID-19 and the time pressures from fulfilling FOI requests specifically as the reason for this.

During the first few months of the pandemic the government's 'Everyone In' programme aimed to find accommodation for rough sleepers. In light of this, we

requested data on how many young people aged 16-24 had been helped through the programme in April 2020 to the end of March 2021. 60 per cent of local authorities provided a response to this question. The lower response rate on this question was mostly due to local authorities saying they did not have the available granularity in their data on Everyone In to provide the detailed breakdown requested. Nevertheless, this was still a good response rate that enabled us to examine the uptake of Everyone In by young homeless people.

Throughout this report all figures referring to key stages of the HRA and how it has performed this year, including percentages for assessment rates, provision of homelessness duties, and the outcomes of this support, will all refer to data from local authorities in England unless otherwise stated.

This year we expanded the qualitative component of the Databank's research to add further insight into the sorts of situations faced by young people, local authorities, and charities involved in homelessness. In addition to interviewing members of Centrepoin's Helpline team and Centrepoin staff in Manchester, we held in-depth interviews with four external homelessness charities as well as commissioning and housing teams from two local authorities. These interviews investigated their experiences of the past year to shed light on best practice and seek their recommendations for changes in policy or practice.

Policy framework

In the United Kingdom, responsibility for tackling homelessness is devolved and each nation has adopted different duties to those who approach them for help.

England

Since 1977 local authorities in the UK have been required to provide assistance to homeless people. The main duties were incorporated into the Housing Act 1996, which brought forward the main provisions of previous Acts and sets out the main statutory duties. Since devolution Welsh and Scottish governments have adapted the provisions in that legislation in different ways.

In England, the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into effect in April 2018. This amends the 1996 Act and changes the homelessness support model provided by local authorities. Prevention and relief support were added as additional tiers of statutory duties regardless of intentionality or the applicant's priority need status. If the prevention and relief work is unsuccessful the applicant is then assessed to determine if they are owed a full housing duty.

These changes to legislation mean that single homeless young people who would have previously received inconsistent support should now all receive prevention and/or relief support according to their needs. This is particularly significant for those young people who are at risk of homelessness, but not necessarily at the immediate point of crisis. Previously they may not have received support, as young single people are less likely to be priority need. Now, under the HRA, everyone threatened with homelessness must be given up to 56 days of support to help secure accommodation.

The HRA aims to give applicants increased influence over their homelessness application through a more collaborative process. The personal housing plan was brought in as part of the Act to be created in partnership with the applicant. Following the assessment, the personal housing plan puts in place the necessary actions to prevent or relieve homelessness. Applicants also now have the right to request internal reviews of decisions at any stage of their process, as well as the right to present at any local authority for support.

The government provided additional burdens funding for local authorities initially for three years with the expectation that funding would not be required beyond this period. Funding for delivery of the Act was later distributed through the Homelessness Reduction Grant and now the Homelessness Prevention Grant. A new data reporting system known as H-CLIC was also introduced as well as a "duty to refer", which places responsibilities on certain agencies to refer people who may be homeless or at risk to local authority housing teams.

Wales

The Wales (Housing) Act 2014 was the first legislation in the UK to shift the emphasis towards prevention and relief work before the full housing duty. Under the Wales (Housing) Act, all young people in Wales who present to their council should be assessed and provided with prevention and/or relief support, based on their circumstances. A full housing duty is then only owed to those in priority need in the event that this support is not successful. Wales is most similar to the HRA landscape in England and provided a model for its development¹.

The data collected by the Welsh Government focuses on the number of outcomes and allows for a breakdown by age group and local authority. The data, available via the online tool from StatsWales, includes information at every stage of the application process. These totals include prevention and relief duties (sections 66 and 73 of the Act) and their outcomes (successful, unsuccessful leading to the next stage of support, and duty ended), as well as the different main duty outcomes (eligible and homeless but not in priority need, eligible homeless and in a priority need but intentionally so, and eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need (Section 75)).

Northern Ireland

Currently, Northern Ireland operates much like England did prior to the HRA. Young people who are eligible, unintentionally homeless, and in priority need are owed a duty to help them secure accommodation. Unlike in England, however, this responsibility lies with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), as opposed to individual local authorities. In addition, eligibility criteria are more complex in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK as prior behaviour is also considered. For anyone who is not owed a housing duty, the NIHE only has a duty to provide advice, though often additional prevention and relief work is carried out.

The data provided by the NIHE includes main duty presentations and main duty acceptances and is broken down by age range, gender and local authorities.

Scotland

Scottish homelessness policy operates on a significantly different model to the other nations. With the abolition of priority need on 31st December 2012, Scotland's policy has been aimed towards providing a full housing duty meaning that all eligible and unintentionally homeless young people are owed a housing duty from their council.

In Scotland all those who present are assessed. This means that the data provided by the Scottish Government focuses on the totals for each of the four potential decisions following presentation which are broken down by local authority. These are homeless and potentially homeless which are then broken down into intentional and unintentional.





The scale of youth homelessness

An increasing number of young people are presenting to local authorities

Across the whole of the UK, almost 122,000 young people aged 16-24 presented to their local authority as homeless or at risk of homelessness between April 2020 to the end of March 2021. This was a slight increase from the 2019/20 total of 121,000, and was the fifth year in a row that this figure has increased year-on-year.

In England, 104,400 young people presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness to their local authority in 2020/21, an increase of 2,300 (2 per cent) from the prior year (102,100).

Scotland saw a slight reduction in the number of young people presenting in 2020/21, going from 7,300 in 2019/20 to 7,000 in 2020/21.

In Wales, there were nearly 6,800 young people who presented to their local authority as homeless or at risk. This was a decrease of 900 (12 per cent) from the

previous financial year (7,700 in 2019/20).

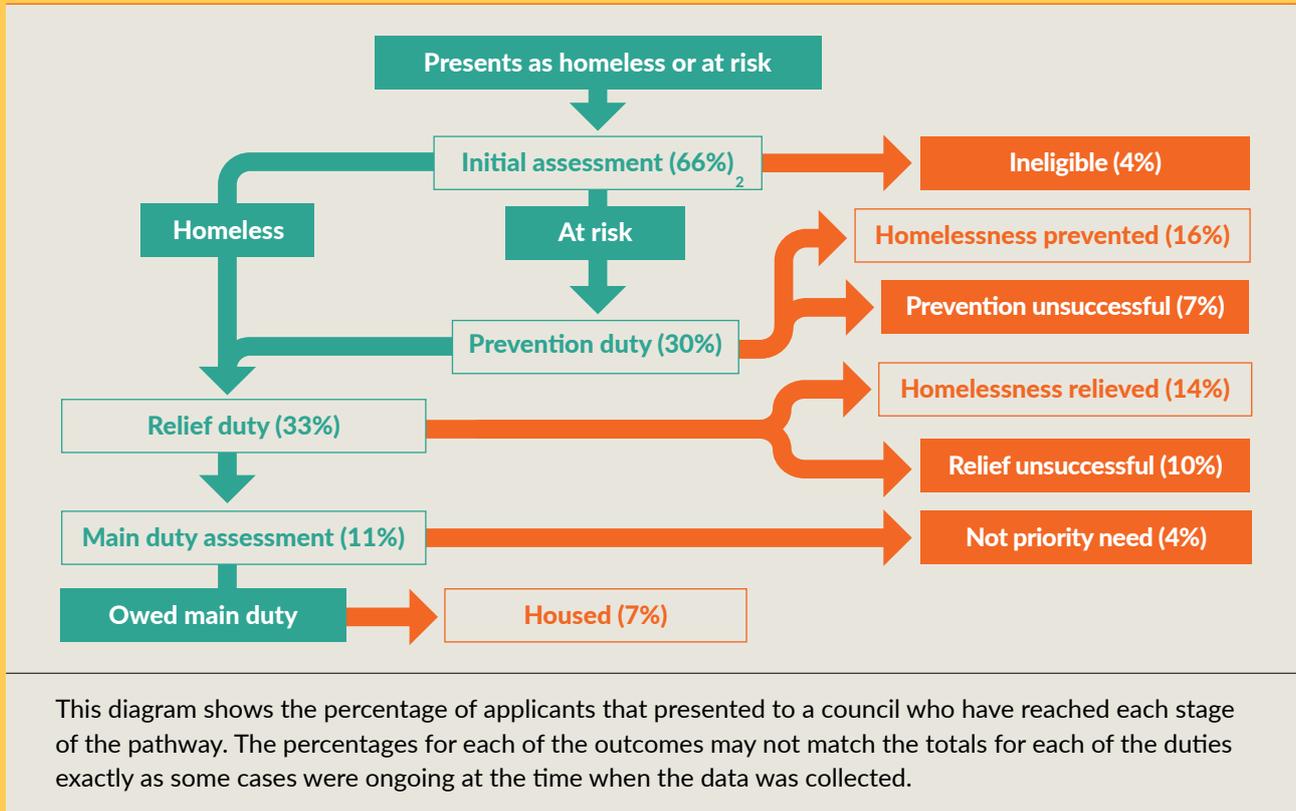
In Northern Ireland, there were nearly 3,500 presentations in 2020/21, which was an increase of almost 200 (6 per cent) from the previous financial year (3,300 in 2019/20).

As these figures show, the overall year-on-year trend varied between the nations, and the local data revealed significant differences in trends even within the same region. However, overall, the number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk was slightly higher than the previous year showing that national demand continued to grow during the first year of the pandemic. This is particularly concerning given that significant measures that were put in place during this period to limit the number of people experiencing homelessness. These included the eviction ban, the temporary uplift in Universal Credit and the Everyone In scheme.

Young people's journey through the Homelessness Reduction Act

Local authorities provided Centrepoin's Youth Homelessness Databank with figures showing how many young people had presented as homeless or at risk, had an assessment, and how many had been provided homelessness assistance as well as the outcomes of this assistance by the local authority.

The diagram below shows the percentage of young people in England that presented to a council who have reached each stage of the HRA pathway. The percentages for each of the outcomes may not match the totals for each of the duties exactly as some cases were ongoing at the time when the data was collected.



The assessment rate for young people is still far from 100 per cent, meaning that significant numbers of young people presenting as homeless or at risk to their local authority are not even getting an initial assessment to determine whether or not they can receive support.

who approach their local authority do not even get an assessment. This is despite the fact that the government's Homelessness Code of Guidance (which sets out expectations for local councils in dealing with homelessness) 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.

Centrepoin's data shows that in England one third of young people who are facing homelessness and



² This is calculated by adding the number for whom the Prevention Duty prevented their homelessness, the Relief Duty relieved their homelessness, and the Main Housing Duty housed them.

Fewer young people are getting initial assessments

In the last three years, despite the number of young people facing homelessness that approach their local authority for help increasing, fewer are being properly assessed. The percentage of young people who are assessed to determine whether they are eligible for support has fallen from 79 per cent in the financial year 2018/19 to 66 per cent in 2020/21. More young people than ever are not even getting the chance to see whether they may be eligible for support, let alone the actual support itself. This low rate of assessment has dropped every year since the Homelessness Code of Guidance – which was set up to help local authorities effectively implement the Homelessness Reduction Act – was released, and indicates a worrying trend in young people not getting the assessment and support they are entitled to.

The government’s Homelessness Code of Guidance states that every young person who presents to their local authority as homeless or at risk of homelessness will require an initial interview, whereupon if there is only **reason to believe** that they may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days, the housing authority must carry out an assessment to determine if this is the case and whether they are eligible for assistance.

*“11.3 Every person applying for assistance from a housing authority stating that they are or are going to be homeless will require an initial interview. If there is reason to believe that they may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days the housing authority **must carry out an assessment to determine if this is the case, and whether they are eligible for assistance.**”*

Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities 2018, c. 11.3.

We know from the Databank, the Centrepoint Helpline, and feedback from our partnering organisations that this is not always the case. When we spoke with charities and organisations that worked with young people who were homeless or at risk, they relayed their experiences of the difficulties seen at the stages between presenting and assessment.

“It’s hard enough for them already to get an assessment on the HRA...Very often it’s not taking place, is it? At all. We know that. That often has to do with young people not being able to show evidence for their imminent homelessness. So that’s the very first barrier already. Well, the very first barrier is not knowing where to access the information, what they need to be doing, but then the evidencing bit is absolutely key.”

Homelessness charity in London

The Centrepoint Helpline heard directly from young people about instances of them being turned away when they were in acute need, including being told that they must be able to ‘prove’ that they are homeless before they would be offered a full assessment. This included examples of young people made homeless due to family breakdown being told that they must provide a letter from their families as proof, and denied support if their parent refused to do so. The Helpline has also supported young people who were told by their local authority that they should remain rough sleeping and get picked up by Streetlink before they could be offered an assessment or any assistance under the HRA. Many practitioners felt that some authorities were using these as gatekeeping practices which undermined the original supportive intentions of the HRA.

Given these experiences and the large discrepancies between the number of young people presenting and receiving a full assessment from local authorities, Centrepoint strongly urges the government to begin collecting data before the assessment stage of the Homelessness Reduction Act – at present the DHLUC figures do not collect data on presentations or initial interviews, and only start at assessment stage. This effectively means that the official figures are missing large numbers of young people in need who are not getting to the assessment stage.

The high response rate to our FOI (84 per cent) demonstrates that local authorities are able to provide this information, so we encourage DHLUC to incorporate the number of presentations into their H-CLIC software and their statutory homelessness live tables to ensure this is collected on a national basis. Doing so would enable government to have a clearer view of demand from young people who are homeless or at risk, so that they can develop the appropriate response to tackling youth homelessness.

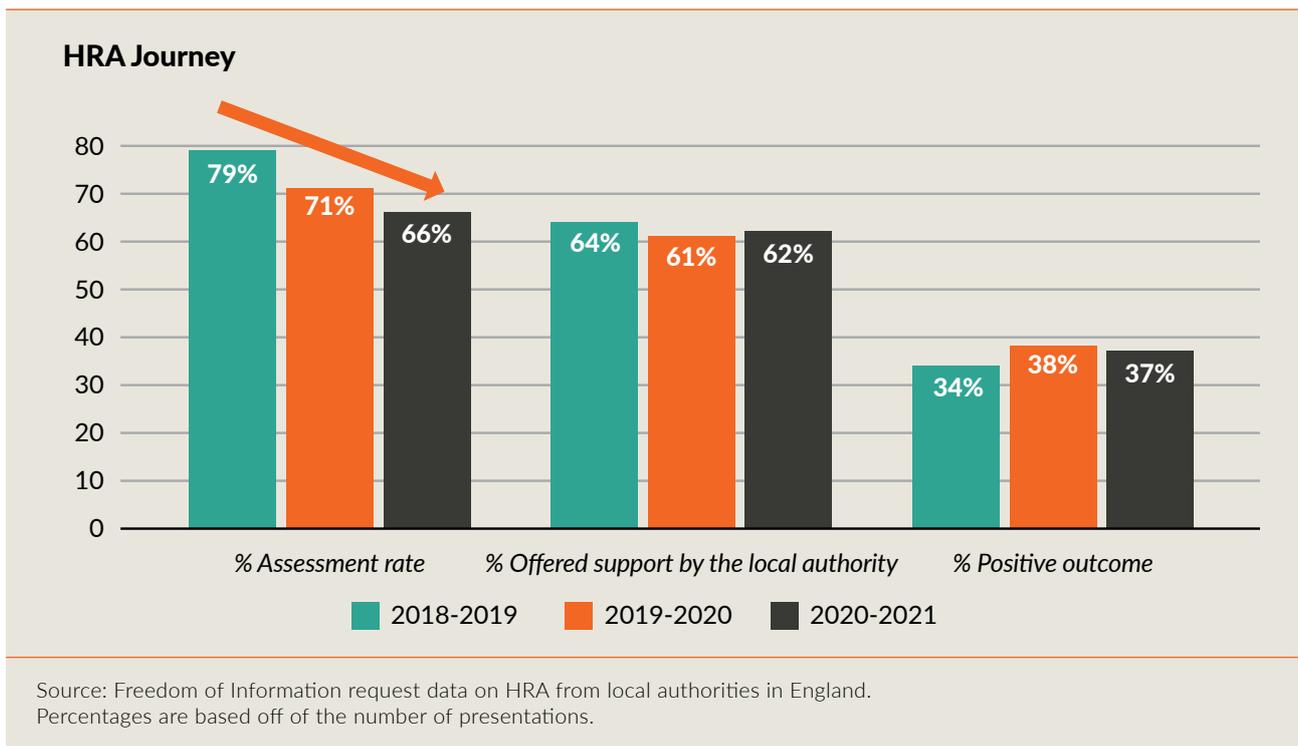
Minority of young people getting positive outcomes

For the third year running nearly six in ten presentations (59 per cent) ended without the young person being supported into housing.

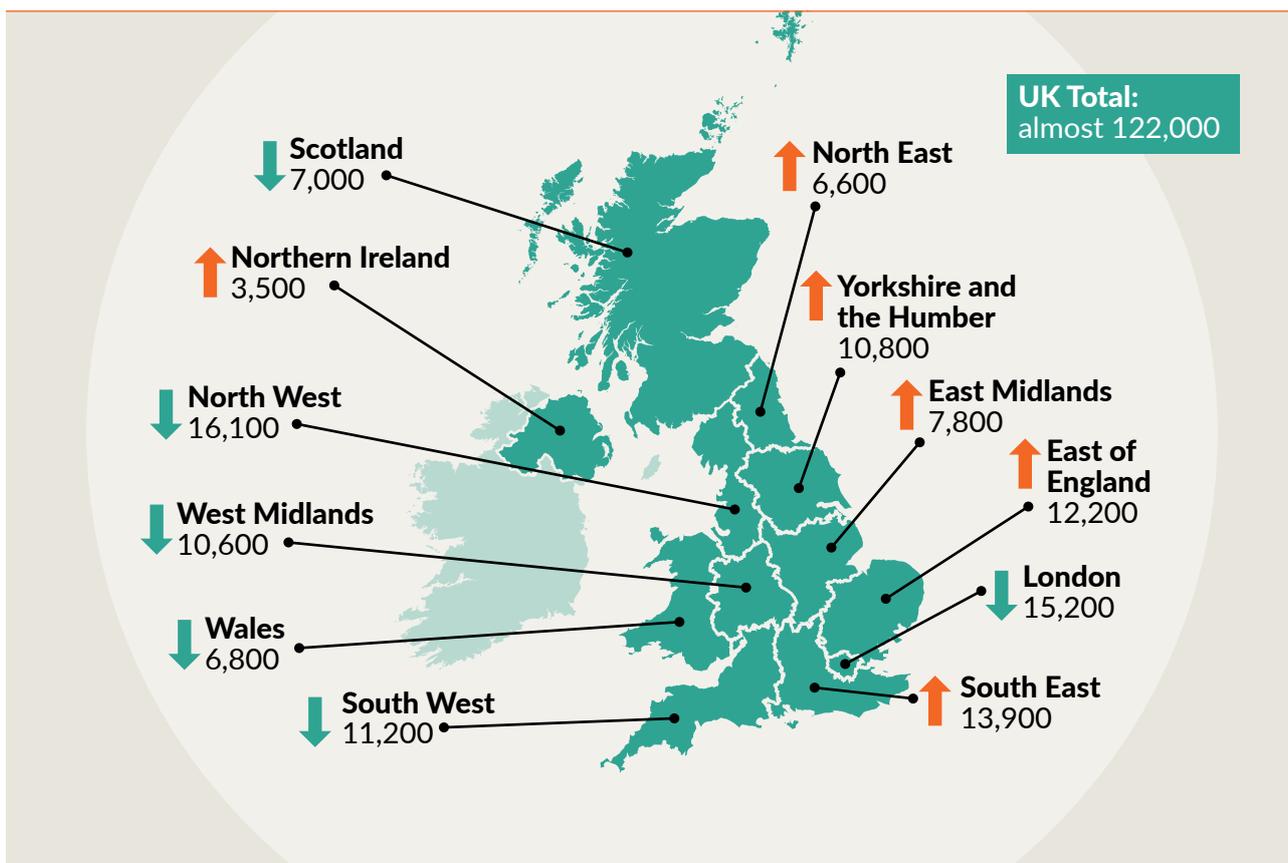
Even when young people do receive a full assessment and are accepted as being owed a duty, the proportion of young people seeing a positive outcome from the process remains concerning low. Centrepoint collected data on:

1. the percentage offered support (through receiving a decision of being owed a relief duty or prevention duty)
2. the percentage who had their homelessness successfully prevented or relieved under these duties, and
3. the percentage who were housed under the main housing duty (because they are in priority need).

Unfortunately, our data showed that the proportion who are housed or had their homelessness effectively prevented or relieved has not substantially improved over the years that the HRA has been in force. In light of the increasing numbers of young people presenting as homeless seen throughout this time, this means that more and more of the young people who face homeless in England do not appear to be getting the support they need when approaching their local authority.



Regional focus



The English regions which saw the **largest increases** in the number of young people seeking help from their local authority because they were homeless or at risk were:

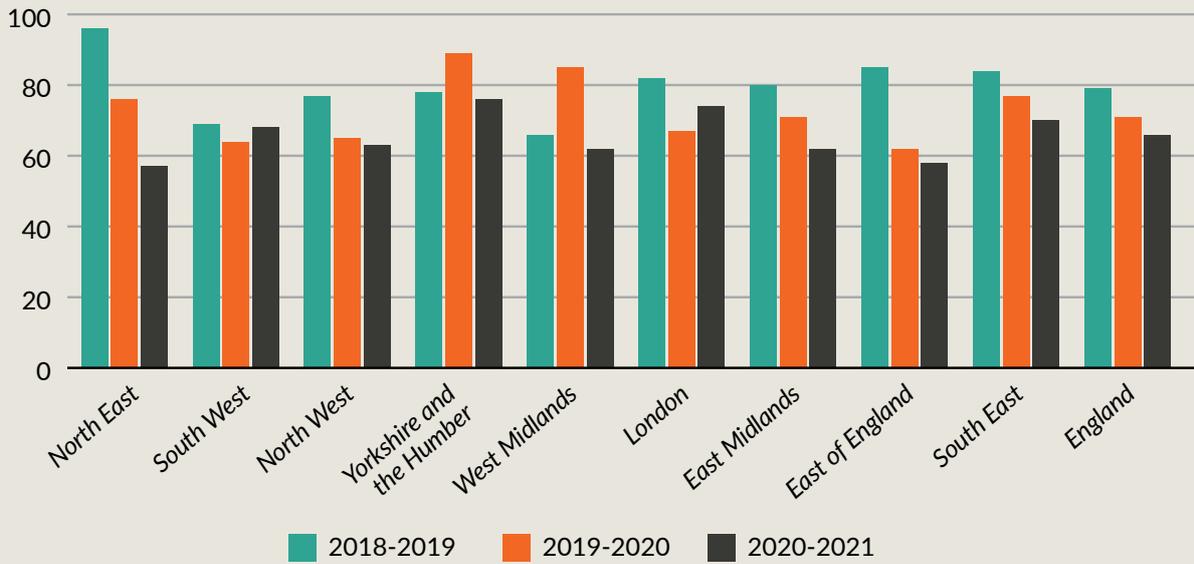
- The North East which saw an increase of 57 per cent from 4,200 presentations in 2019/20 to 6,600 in 2020/21.
- The South East which saw an increase of 13 per cent from 12,300 to 13,900
- Yorkshire and the Humber which saw an increase of 12 per cent from 9,600 to 10,800
- The East Midlands which saw an increase of 12 per cent from 7,000 to 7,800
- The East of England which saw an increase of 8 per cent from 11,300 to 12,200

The regions which saw the **largest decreases** were:

- London which saw a decrease of 12 per cent from 17,200 to 15,200
- The North West which saw a decrease of 9 per cent from 17,600 to 16,100
- The West Midlands which saw a decrease of 9 per cent from 11,600 to 10,600.

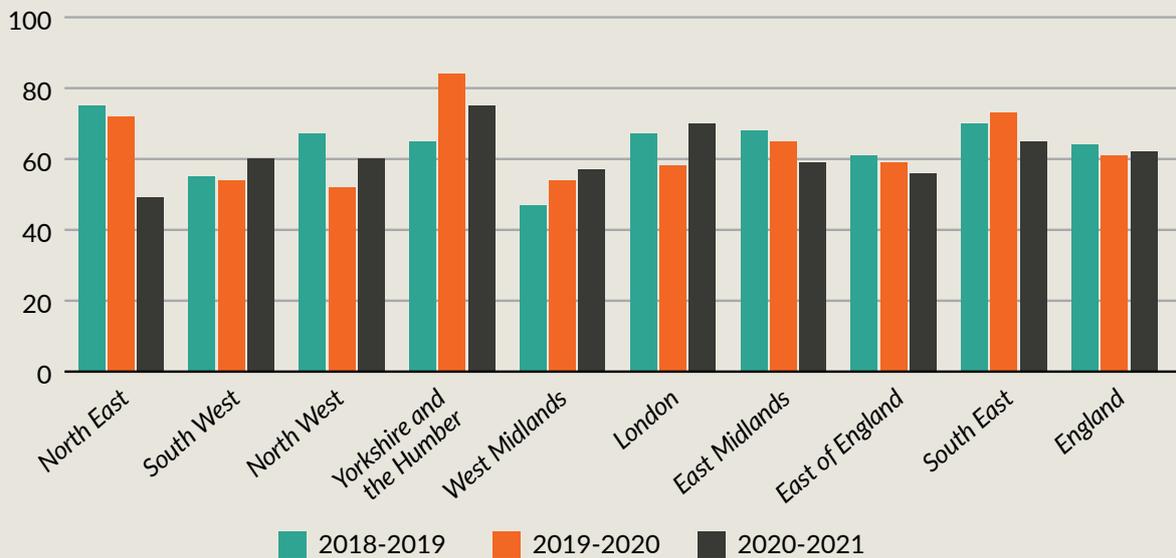


Assessment rate for young people by region in England



Every English region had a lower assessment rate in 2020/21 compared to 2018/19. (However, London and the South West did see improvements on 2019/20). The regions with the lowest assessment rate were the North East (57 per cent) and the East of England (58 per cent) which were markedly lower than the overall assessment rate for England of 66 per cent.

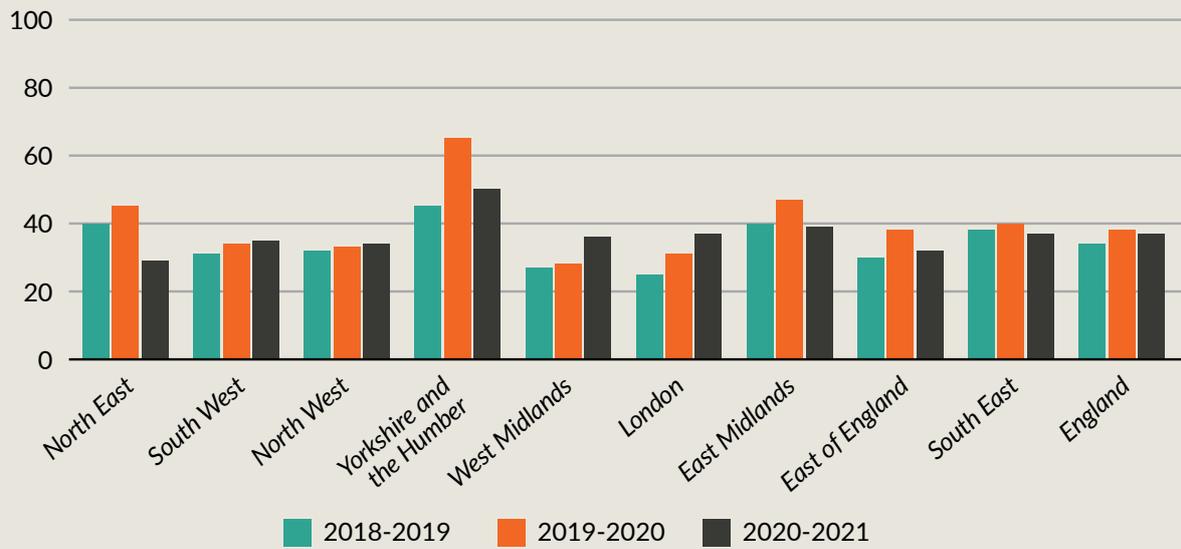
Percentage of young people who presented being offered a prevention or relief duty by the local authority



Four out of nine regions had an improvement in their % offered support versus last year.

Overall, England had a very slight improvement in the percentage being offered support by their local authority, but overall the level of this remains relatively stable over the last three years.

Percentage of young people getting housed or having their homelessness relieved or prevented after presenting



Four out of nine regions had an improvement in the percentage of young people having positive outcomes versus last year.

Overall, England had a slight dip in the proportion of young people seeing positive outcomes after presenting but it has largely stayed static over the last three years.

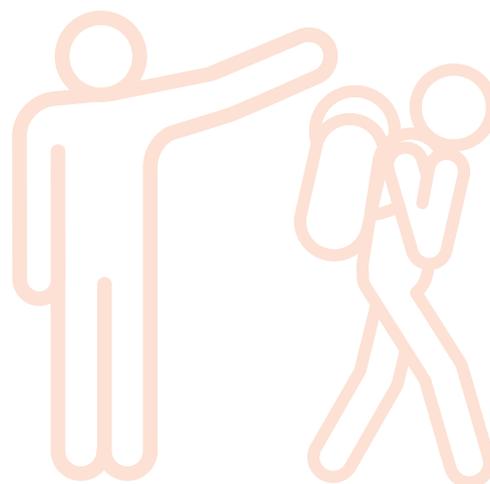


Causes of homelessness

In England, the biggest three specified reasons for loss or the threat of loss for young people's last settled home were:

- 1. Family no longer willing or able to accommodate – 49%**
- 2. Domestic abuse – 9%**
- 3. Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate – 6%**

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.
Released September 2021ⁱⁱ



More young people being made homeless due to family breakdown and domestic abuse

These top three specified causes of homelessness in England were identical for all regions in England, except for the East Midlands, East of England, and South West where the 3rd biggest reason was being evicted from supported housing.

The vast majority of the domestic abuse cases were young women. The number of women aged 16-24 who gave this as a reason was 9 times higher than the number of men giving this as a reason for a loss or the threat of loss for their last settled home.

Compared to the year before, these top three reasons are identical, but the percentage of cases where family were no longer willing or able to accommodate increased from 45% last year (2019/20) to 49% this year.

This supports our findings from the qualitative research which revealed there have been increased tensions felt in the households of young people during the pandemic. Breakdown in families and friendships that had accommodated young people was already the biggest reason for young people becoming homeless even prior to the pandemic, but with lockdown and the pressures around this it has led to more and more relationships being put under pressure which has in turn increased the numbers of young people becoming homeless or at risk.

“in the first three months of the financial year, which coincided with the first lockdown of the COVID pandemic, there was a reported 60% increase in parental eviction...”

Member of Commissioning team at a South East Council

“We saw a lot of people getting furloughed, loss of income, but also pressure cooker environments: not being able to leave home. So that exacerbated any family tensions, and not being able to sofa-surf, which is what so many of our young people end up doing. So there was definitely an increased pressure, I think the numbers spiked initially 50% up on previous months, as we went into that first lockdown.”

Centrepoint's Helpline staff member

“Pre-pandemic, young people could go out for the day and then kind of go home at the end of the day. But I think that whole families isolating together, the lockdown, all of those things have caused just an increase in tensions... people haven't been able to have a break from each other, even if that's just for the day or going to a mate's house for a couple of nights or whatever that is. They just haven't been able to have that break. And I think that's been reflected as well, hasn't it with the really serious increase in domestic violence; where there have been poor relationships they've just got worse.”

Homelessness charity in the South East

Domestic abuse has risen to be an even bigger driver of homelessness during the pandemic. Between April 2019 and the end of March 2020 England had 4,530 young people who faced homelessness because of domestic abuse which accounted for 7.9 per cent of all the young people owed a homelessness duty. Over the recent financial year this increased to 5,296 (9.3 per cent) in period April 2020 to end of March 2021ⁱⁱ

“I think across the board, including young people, what we've seen is we have seen an increase in family license terminations, and being isolated from friends' accommodation and that kind of heat when lockdown began last year. So, you know, the insight, and what we think people were experiencing was people who were sofa surfing or staying with family and friends and the concern about transmission of infection. So that was across the board, but included young people [and], again, across the board, an increase in domestic abuse cases. And there were high degrees of those, and also an increase in rough sleeping.”

A local authority in London

Lockdown led to the sudden disappearance of support structures that had kept many people in informal accommodation arrangements that they used to rely on to alleviate their homelessness particularly for those facing domestic abuse:

“We certainly have seen an increase in young women presenting to our services, and some of the local authorities have reported that as well. We're not quite sure why. Obviously for the young women we think it's definitely to do with the increase in domestic abuse and domestic violence that we've seen in the pandemic. We also know that young women tend to be a little bit better in finding and keeping informal accommodation arrangements, by self-survey. But that obviously has fallen apart. I think also it's because a lot of the other support systems like school, or college, or youth clubs were closed and weren't there; and I think young women tend to be a bit better at using those support structures and they just weren't there.”

Homelessness charity in London

Small reduction in homelessness due to eviction

The number of young people facing homelessness due to eviction fell slightly in 2020/21.

In 2020/21, 2,870 (or five per cent of those owed a homelessness duty)³ were homeless as a result of being evicted from a private, social or supported housing tenancy. This was down from six per cent the year before.

It is likely this was down to the government's restriction on evictions introduced during the pandemic, namely: the restriction on private rented sector evictions; requiring landlords to give tenants longer notice periods before starting possession proceedings from March 2020; a six month suspension on housing possession action in the courts between the end of March and late September 2020, and a restriction on bailiff enforcement activity from mid November 2020 until the end of May 2021.

While these measures were very welcome and do appear to have had a small positive effect, evictions only account for a small proportion of youth homelessness cases³. Furthermore, many of the practitioners we spoke to worried that the freezing of evictions may have just delayed when these evictions will take place meaning that we may see more of these cases during this financial year.



³ As measured by the MHCLG statistics on the reasons for last tenancy ending. Number of households by age and gender where main applicant was aged between 16-24 in England initially owed a Prevention or Relief Duty by reason for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home. In England between April 2019 to March 2020 this showed that six per cent of the homelessness duty cases cited one of the following as reasons for their loss of last settled home: Illegal eviction; Eviction from supported housing; YP evicted.

Accessibility problems

Many local authorities struggled under the pressures associated with COVID-19 and the lockdown, and restrictions meant that they had to close their face-to-face services and move to a fully online and phone service. Centrepont's Helpline reported that this had made it much harder to access support for young people in some areas:

"It was very difficult to get hold of councils...we've spent like 45 minutes or more on the phone trying to get through to the council and say, Hi, I'm homeless, or I'm speaking to someone who is homeless. So there was a huge lack of accessibility there."

Centrepont Helpline Team

These sort of delays can be very difficult for young people to navigate, particularly when they are in the midst of these crises and in need of support, and have a big impact on the wellbeing of that individual.

"Obviously there have been accessibility issues in the last year particularly with housing options services being physically closed, a misunderstanding about young people's ability to be online. People assume it's fine, you may have a mobile phone, but it doesn't mean you have credit, it doesn't mean you have wifi, particularly at a time where lots of public services like libraries are closed. Also its really, really hard to... follow-through. What we see is that the follow up from local authorities isn't consistent. So a young person may present as homeless or be imminently facing homelessness, there may be some [contact], but then it's very unclear how and when that's being followed up. So again, that's when young people sort of disengage – people don't call back when they say they will, so the flow of information is not quite good enough"

Homelessness charity in London

In light of these difficulties with accessibility, some young people experiencing homelessness may have been unable to get through to the local authority and would not have been counted in their homelessness presentation figures. These should therefore be viewed as minimum estimates.

Practitioners highlighted that poor communication can lead young people to disengage from the process and to end up falling out of the system without getting the support they need. It is therefore crucial that more is done to provide consistent good quality and timely communications.

It is important to note however, that local authorities were under extreme pressures during this period and that the pandemic came after they had seen many years of cuts to their budgets due to austerity measures.

"Local authorities have seen between 40 and 50% of the revenue support grant cut in the last decade. You really can't do that and expect to see an improvement in service provision. So there really has to be a new settlement for local government."

Member of the Commissioning team at a South East England Council



Positive impact of youth-oriented service provision

Young people have distinct needs as a result of their age and relative inexperience of living independently, meaning that they benefit from specialist care and service provision at the point of contact. The practitioners we spoke to highlighted that there is inconsistency in the delivery of a youth-specific service offer. However, those operating in local authorities that have been implementing youth-oriented services in their housing teams had seen improvements as a result.

"What we are also seeing is there is some good practice happening in some of the local authorities where they may invite a youth specialist. Or there is a whole culture within some of the housing and homelessness teams where they invest in youth services or youth-specific provision. I think it's patchy but it's out there."

Homelessness charity in London

Everyone In

As well as asking about homelessness presentation, this year's FOI asked for data on the number of young people supported through Everyone In. 191 local authorities provided this information, and in total across these local authorities 5,600 young people were housed through Everyone In over April 2020 to the end of March 2021.

Region	Number of young people helped through Everyone In	How many local authorities gave figure	Number of local authorities in region	What percentage of local authorities gave us this data
North East	889	7	12	58%
South West	913	20	30	67%
North West	834	24	39	62%
Yorkshire and the Humber	571	18	21	86%
West Midlands	312	18	30	60%
London	565	20	33	61%
East Midlands	286	20	40	50%
East of England	538	22	45	49%
South East	695	42	63	67%

The gender breakdown of the Everyone In cohort was markedly different from the population of young people supported by the HRA pathway. The majority of young people presenting as homeless or at risk were female (56 per cent female, 42 per cent male, and 2 per cent Not Known/other). But less than a third of those housed under Everyone In were women (31 per cent female and 68 per cent male, and 1 % Not Known / Other). This is likely because Everyone In was primarily focused on those facing rough sleeping who have been consistently shown through other datasets (including the government's rough sleeping snapshot) to be disproportionately male.

Everyone In was a huge achievement and demonstrated how quickly and efficiently organisations across the sector could come together to support those in need when significant financial support was available. In addition to this, it showed what could be achieved if there was a political will nationally and locally to do so. However, many of the practitioners we interviewed raised concerns about what will happen in the future to those who were housed through Everyone In, and spoke of their worries about an increase in street homelessness when the funding ends.

“...now that Everyone In is ending our big challenge is we've still got about 300 people in the hotels, and we need to rehouse them, and that's a big challenge. So there will be a temporary spike in street homelessness and young people will be affected.”

Local authority in South East England

“I would hope that we don't just let it slip back to people being on the streets. I mean, it's a huge change for [our city], because... [before] there were roads where there were literally tents every shop doorway. And I would really hope that we don't go back to that, that we don't allow this to slip, because you know, it's proven it can be done, and I appreciate that there's been extra money. But it's still been proven that it can be done”

Homelessness charity, South East

Conclusion

It is deeply concerning that, even with the unprecedented measures put in place during the pandemic to support families and prevent homelessness, the number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk has continued to increase for the fifth consecutive year. But what is most concerning is that behind these numbers are thousands of individual young people in crisis and in need of support. While many of these young people will receive the support and provision they need from their council, our data shows that far too many are not. It is therefore vital that national government, local government and the homelessness sector work together to ensure that all young people presenting as homeless in the future get the support they need to escape homelessness for good.



The Impact of COVID-19 on a National Youth Homelessness Helpline

As part of a research project with King's College London, Centrepoin recently investigated the impact of COVID-19 on youth homelessnessⁱⁱⁱ.

Analysis of data:

- There was an **increased demand** for the helpline throughout COVID-19. Calls rose from 8,937 between April 2019 and February 2020 to 12,742 between March 2020 to February 2021.
- Throughout COVID-19, more males were contacting the helpline than before COVID-19, with an increase of 6.89%, rising from 40% of total calls to 47%.

The thematic analysis of helpline calls revealed 3 main themes: **Need for Safety, Need for Support, Suitability of Living Conditions.**



Need for Safety:

All young people in the sample described feeling in some way unsafe. Young people reported they were fleeing abuse and violence, which had been exacerbated by the pandemic:

“We’re always arguing and there’s a lot of violence that happens and during this Coronavirus, obviously the violence has got a lot worse and I’ve been having to have to stay out and stay out with friends for so long now”

(Young Person 7).

Young people were also experiencing emotional abuse, in the form of control, this included limiting access to personal identification, leaving limited opportunities to flee from abuse:

“Also, my only form of ID is my passport right now and that’s with my parents and it’s like, they’ve hidden it from me, so I can’t even open my own bank account. I can’t do anything without ID. So I’m not sure exactly what to do”

(Young Person 2).

Young people also reported they were feeling mentally unsafe, experiencing a plethora of mental health difficulties:

“I’m calling because my mental health is really bad and obviously the way I’m feeling right now, I’m living with my parents and my mental health is really bad to a state where I don’t get enough sleep, I’m not sleeping. You know like, I’m depressed”

(Young Person 4).

Need for Support:

All young people reported feeling they needed some form of support. This included support from authorities, who young people perceived as difficult to work with.

“The council are being very stubborn. They will not house me. They just count me as not priority even though I have severe mental health issues [...] They're not helping me and obviously I thought I'd ring yourself for some sort of advice to see what you could recommend.”

(Young Person 8).

Unsurprisingly, young people were also seeking out financial support, with lack of money perpetuating young people remaining in unsafe environments:

“I want to move out but right now I'm looking for a job so if I get a job my problem is like first where I'll be until I get enough money to pay rent if I am to move out”

(Young Person 2).

Suitability of Living Conditions:

Young people contacting the helpline reported they were currently living in unsuitable housing conditions, or they were in fact, already homeless.

“It's just not a healthy lifestyle to be living in [...] I've been having to have to stay out and stay out with friends for so long, do you know what I mean? I'm like taking the mick out of my friends now, that's how it feels”

(Young Person 7)

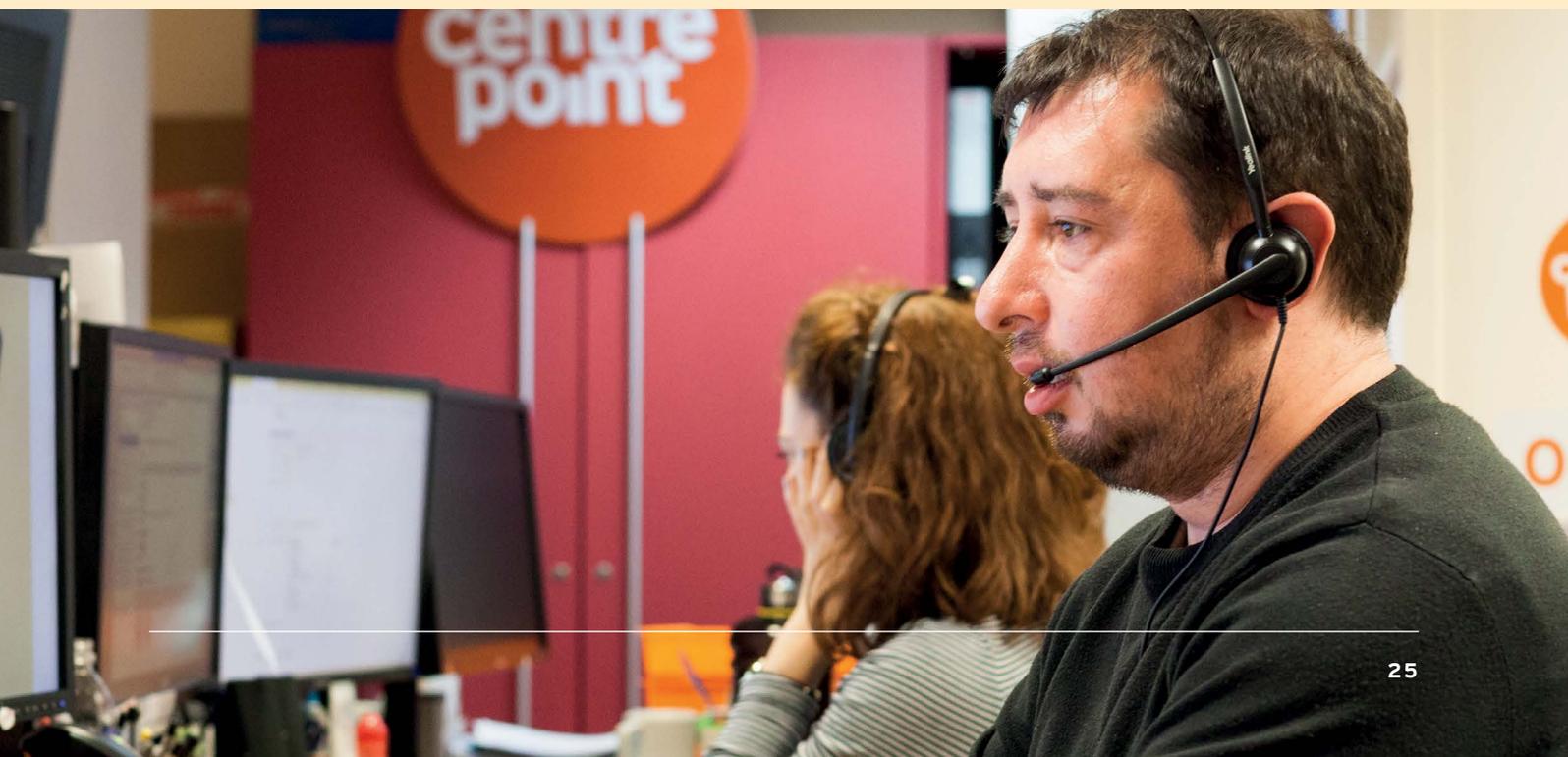
“I've had to try and find somewhere, it's been hard to, I've been on the streets for three nights already, I've had somewhere to stay last night and somewhere for the day today [...] I've got somewhere for tonight and today and then after that I'm on my own again”

(Young Person 2).

Family arguments including threatened eviction were also a cause of distress for young people:

“I'm, you know, in a crisis where I need some kind of support or some kind of help to get me through this. Like with my parents I'm arguing with them all the time, you know. They're threatening me like to kick me out the house and all of that stuff and obviously I have a 14 month old”

(Young Person 4).



Technical Appendix

Homelessness policy in the UK is devolved in the four individual nations, each having independent policy that inform their different data collection policies. At present the English government does not publish data broken down by age with the exception of a combined prevention and/or relief duty owed, which does not allow for an understanding of the full scale of youth homelessness. Therefore Centrepont sends a Freedom of Information request to every local authority in England in order to collect a more complete dataset. This data is combined with publicly available data from Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in order to build a complete picture for the UK.

This year saw a good response rate to Centrepont's Freedom of Information request, with 84% of local authorities responding. Additionally the majority of those councils that responded to our request were able to provide some or all of the data requested, helping to produce the most complete picture to date on the scale of youth homelessness.

However, the response rate this year was notably lower than for the 2018/19 Databank when 95% of local authorities provided data. This is likely due to the

ongoing effect that COVID-19 is having on the workload of councils. In addition, a significant number of those who did respond were unable to provide data due to our request exceeding the 18 hours allocated for Freedom of Information requests often because issues with IT systems had meant the request would had to have been carried out manually.

The table below shows the response rates and number of responding councils across each question in the Freedom of Information request in England. The percentages below for the response rate refer to 317 local authorities in England with responsibility for homelessness support (we acknowledge that this number is different to the 309 figure from the government of how many district and single-tier local authorities there are in England, but many local authorities gave data recorded at the council level prior to being recombined with others (for example Kettering gave us FOI data but is technically now in North Northamptonshire council) and others combined their replies with others for ease of data supply (e.g. 3C shared services). The figure of 317 was used as this was the total of local authorities in the prior databank report used for response calculations.

% of local authorities	Data provided
83%	presented to their council as they are homeless or at risk (262)
81%	were assessed for a prevention or relief duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (256)
81%	received an initial assessment of being owed a prevention duty (256)
81%	received an initial assessment of being owed a relief duty (258)
79%	had a successful prevention duty outcome (250)
71%	had a prevention duty end leading to a relief duty (226)
74%	had a prevention duty end for any other reason (233)
80%	had a relief duty end successfully (253)
76%	had a relief duty end for any other reason (242)
75%	assessed under the Housing Act 1996 (238)
72%	accepted as statutorily homeless and owed a housing duty by their council (229)
60%	housed Through Everyone In (191)
47%	gave data for all parts of the Freedom of Information request, including Everyone In (148)

Estimating the scale of youth homelessness

Centrepoin’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. The calculation uses data from the 83 per cent of councils in England who provided this data and uses this as the basis of an estimate of the number of young people presenting in the local authorities which did not respond.

A data quality audit was carried out on each local authority that provided data. Councils where figures at one stage exceeded the numbers upstream were contacted to explain the discrepancy. Data received as part of the Freedom of Information request was compared to the only publicly available DHLUC data with age breakdowns, prevention and relief duties owed. Where there was a discrepancy this was queried with the local authority.

A selection of variables related to the structural factors understood to affect the rates of homelessness, including house affordability and access, benefit uptake, and poverty indicators, were used based on a MHCLG and DWP commissioned feasibility study around the measurement and prediction of homelessness to create a prediction model for the councils with known and verified presenting figures. These variables were all sourced from government data publications and needed to be available at a local authority level so that they could be appended to the presenting data.

A multiple linear regression model was used, meaning that the natural logarithm was taken of all variables before modelling the relationships. This had multiple benefits, primarily it ensured that the data met all the assumptions of linear regression and, secondly, it improved the linearity of the relationships between the presenting data and the significant predictor variables.

	Estimate	standard error	t stat
(Intercept)	0.31	(0.42)	0.747
Log(NumberDeathsDrugMisuse)	0.26***	(0.08)	3.398
Log(WelfareClaimantCount16to24)	0.68***	(0.08)	8.970
R²	0.61		
Num. obs.	206		

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

House affordability: This measure, compiled annually by the Office for National Statistics, compares median income in the local authority to the median house price.

Youth population: The number of young people (16-24) recorded as part of the mid-2019 estimates.

Claimants aged 16-24: The number of people (16-24) claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance plus those who claim Universal Credit and are required to seek work and be available for work. Published by the Office of National Statistics.

Social units: The total social rented units owned by each local authority in England, compiled by the regulator of Social housing.

Number of deaths related to drug misuse: persons by local authority, England and Wales, registered in each year between 1993 and 2020 who died due to drug misuse. Published by the Office for National Statistics.

It was not possible to obtain robust local authority level data on personal factors that contributed to homelessness nor was it possible to get sufficient data on the fragmentation of families.

It should be noted that although they inform the estimate, it is not possible from this alone to infer any causation from this report, 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 or vice versa. We would however support any further research into how these could affect the scale of youth homelessness in the UK.

The final model was then run on those local authorities who had not provided a (valid) presenting figure in response to Centrepoin’s Freedom of Information request. This process output a prediction for the presenting figure for all local authorities. The estimated presentations were used for the local authorities who

had not provided a figure for presentations in England. 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. This produced the estimate of almost 122,000 young people who presented to their council as they were homeless or at risk.

Equivalent data collected in previous years (the Databank holds data dating back to 2012/13) allows for a comparison over time to understand any changes in the scale of youth homelessness at a local and national level. These calculations consider those local authorities that have provided comparable data for multiple years. Due to a number of councils changing the definitions of what data is returned, or their internal processes, only data from 2018/19 and 2019/20, and 2020/21 is included in this analysis. This ensures that the comparisons made are valid and reflect only actual change in the scale of youth homelessness.

For the UK wide estimate of youth homelessness, the England figure was added to the total number of young people assessed in Scotland, Wales and Northern

Ireland. This data was obtained from central sources in each of the nations. All nations here reported that all young people who were presented were also assessed and therefore this data is reflective of presentations. 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.

For calculations involved in the outcomes of the HRA process, for instance, the percentages receiving an assessment, a prevention or relief duty, or the percentage of positive outcomes, these are only calculated for local authorities that also provided a figure for presentations. This ensures that any figures taken for regional or national levels are as accurate as possible given the data provided from the complete FOIs. Doing this enables a comparison across the years as the response rate has naturally changed, but the percentages obtaining from each of these years will still be a valid comparison. To further reflect this, when comparing across years we have used the percentages rather than the total figures for those given an assessment, or homelessness duty, or positive outcome to compare as these will differ according to the response rate in a given year.

End notes

- i. Mackie, P.; Gray, T.; Hughes, C.; Madoc-Jones, I.; Mousteri, V.; Pawson, H.; Spyropoulos, N.; Stirling, T.; Taylor, H.; Watts, B. (2019). Review of Priority Need in Wales. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 70/2020. Available at: <https://gov.wales/review-priority-need-wales> [accessed 23 November 2021]
- ii. MHCLG (2021) Statutory homelessness statistics release. Official statistics on statutory homelessness in England for the 2020-21 financial year. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2020-21> [accessed 27 Oct 2021]
- iii. Brennan, A. (2021) The Impact of COVID-19 on A National Youth Homelessness Helpline. The study used a mixed-methods design, using statistical analysis to compare the demographics of young people contacting the helpline from before and during the pandemic, and a thematic analysis of helpline calls was conducted to identify the needs of young people contacting the helpline.



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