



**ENDING YOUTH
HOMELESSNESS**

LOCAL AUTHORITY GATEKEEPING

**Centrepont
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LOCAL AUTHORITY GATEKEEPING

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), everyone in England approaching their local authority for help because they are homeless or at risk of homelessness is entitled to an assessment. However, Centrepoint's latest Youth Homelessness Databank found that **a third of the young people who approached their local authority in England in 2023/24 were not assessed for eligibility**.^[i]

Although some of these discrepancies may result from young people not meeting the eligibility threshold for assessment and support, evidence from Centrepoint's Helpline indicates that many local authorities are employing practices that unfairly restrict access to homelessness services.

Between August 2024 - July 2025, **Centrepoint's Youth Homelessness Helpline supported 5,444 young people**. The Centrepoint Helpline provides housing advice in England to young people aged 16-25 or their family and friends over email, webchat, Whatsapp and phone. Centrepoint Helpline Advisors listen to young people and provide them with advice and details of services they can access.

Unfortunately, **around 1 in 10 calls that the Helpline receives involve gatekeeping by local authorities** (9.5 per cent of all calls during August 2024 - July 2025). In this briefing, gatekeeping is defined as the denial of a homelessness assessment and/or support by local authorities to people who have a right to them.

Using data collected by the Centrepoint Helpline between August 2023 and July 2025, **the following analysis explores rates of gatekeeping over time, by demographics and by gatekeeping type**. ^[1]

[1] The below data refers to instances of gatekeeping, rather than young people impacted by gatekeeping. A young person can experience gatekeeping more than once.

LOCAL AUTHORITY DUTIES AND HOMELESSNESS PATHWAY

APPLICATION

The homelessness process begins when an individual approaches the local authority and provides information indicating they may be homeless or at risk of homelessness. Applications can be made to any department of the local authority and expressed in any form. At this point, the council is legally obliged to take a homelessness application. This initial stage allows the authority to formally record the individual's circumstances and begin the process of assessing their needs and entitlements. The application is the gateway to all further duties and support.

ASSESSMENT

Once an application has been made, the council must carry out a thorough assessment of the applicant's circumstances. This includes establishing their current housing situation, understanding the reasons for homelessness or threatened homelessness, and identifying any vulnerabilities or support needs. The assessment should be conducted promptly, with current guidance recommending a full written decision within 33 working days. During this stage, the council also explores potential options to prevent homelessness where possible.

PRIORITY NEED AND INTERIM ACCOMMODATION

Priority need is a legal category that determines who the local council must provide emergency accommodation for if they are homeless. Once the council has reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need, they must provide interim accommodation immediately while inquiries are completed. People considered to have priority need include households with dependent children, pregnant women, individuals who are vulnerable due to old age, disability, or another special reason, those who are homeless because of an emergency such as a fire or flood, and certain young people aged 16 - 17 as well as care leavers under 21.

PREVENTION DUTY

The prevention duty applies to individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless within the next 56 days. The council must take reasonable steps to help the applicant retain their current accommodation or secure alternative housing. This involves creating a Personal Housing Plan, which outlines support from the council and actions the applicant will take to remain in their current home or secure new accommodation.

RELIEF DUTY

The relief duty applies to individuals who are already homeless and lasts for up to 56 days. During this time, the council must take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure accommodation. Even if the applicant is not in priority need, they are entitled to receive advice, support, and active assistance under this duty. The relief duty ends if suitable accommodation is secured, the applicant refuses an offer, or the 56-day period expires without suitable accommodation being secured.

LOCAL CONNECTION

A local connection is a link that someone has to a particular council area and determines which council is primarily responsible for assisting with homelessness. A local connection can exist if a person currently lives in the area (usually at least six months in the last year or three of the last five years), works in the area (employment of at least 16 hours per week), has close family such as parents, adult children, or siblings in the area for at least five years, or has special circumstances, for example needing medical care or support services in the area. Importantly, having a local connection does not prevent a council from assessing a person's homelessness situation; it mainly affects which council carries out the relief and main housing duty.

MAIN HOUSING DUTY

Following the assessment and completion of prevention or relief duties, if the applicant is found to be homeless, in priority need, and not intentionally homeless, the council has a main housing duty. This requires the authority to secure suitable long-term accommodation, such as social housing or a private tenancy for at least a year.



FINDINGS

Centrepoin't's Helpline recorded **449 instances of gatekeeping between August 2024 - July 2025** (a 2 per cent increase on 440 gatekeeping instances in August 2023 - July 2024), representing 9.5 per cent of relevant calls.[2] This is equivalent to **over 1 young person calling Centrepoin't every day asking for help** because their local authority has refused to provide them with homelessness support.

Gatekeeping was reported in 44 per cent of all local authorities mentioned by young people (132 local authorities, out of 299 in total).

Of the gatekeeping instances recorded, 40 per cent of contacts were female, 33 per cent were male, 0.2 per cent were non binary and 27 per cent did not disclose their gender identity.

The most common cause of homelessness in the gatekeeping instances reported by young people were **family breakdown** (38 per cent), **domestic abuse** (16 per cent), and **eviction** (12 per cent), and a large proportion did not disclose (12 per cent). These findings are consistent with Centrepoin't's previous databank findings that showed these situations as the top causes for youth homelessness during 2023/24.[ii]

DOMESTIC ABUSE

Interestingly, the rate of gatekeeping linked to domestic abuse was slightly higher than the proportion of domestic abuse cases typically recorded in Helpline calls (16 per cent versus 11 per cent). Helpline staff reported anecdotally that gatekeeping is common when young people disclose domestic abuse. They explained that **local authority staff often fail to take domestic abuse seriously**, particularly when the abuse is from a family member or is emotional or verbal in nature. In some cases, local authorities **request evidence that is unreasonable to obtain and may place young people at further risk** by requiring them to return to the environment where the abuse occurred.

Centrepoin't research has found that there is **considerable overlap between young people who have experienced domestic abuse and those affected by family breakdown**.^[iii] In some cases, a history of parental abuse may influence a young person's decision to leave home during what appears to be an unrelated conflict. As a result, they might not cite domestic abuse as the direct cause of their homelessness, even though it played a role. Therefore, some instances of gatekeeping reported by young people experiencing family breakdown may also involve domestic abuse.

[2] Gatekeeping data is only collected for young people directly supported by the helpline team. It is therefore not available for all individuals who contact the helpline, whether for themselves or on behalf of another person. The statistics provided reflect the available data.



CASE STUDY 1: DOMESTIC ABUSE

A 21-year-old young person had to leave the family home due to consistent emotional abuse from their father. They did not feel safe in the property, and stated it was affecting her mental health. They contacted their local council who told them they needed an eviction letter from their parents, even though they had already left the property and did not feel safe returning there. The council also said that involving the police was necessary for their case to be considered a priority.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance outlines that **"Housing authorities should not have a blanket approach toward domestic abuse which requires corroborative or police evidence to be provided."** [3]

It further highlights that, in some cases, corroborative evidence of domestic abuse may be unavailable, for example, if there were no witnesses or the young person was too frightened or ashamed to report incidents. Often the housing officer is the first professional the young person has confided in. **By ignoring this guidance, the council failed to protect the young person, leaving them vulnerable to further harm and homelessness.**

[3] The Homelessness Code of Guidance is an official document that provides local authorities in England with detailed instructions and best-practice guidance on how to assess and assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE PREGNANT OR HAVE CHILDREN

Over the past year, Centrepoin't's Helpline recorded **48 instances** of gatekeeping reported by young people who were pregnant or had children. This represents **14 per cent** of all relevant contacts from this cohort. Under homelessness legislation, people who are pregnant or have dependent children are recognised as having a priority need and should therefore receive prompt and appropriate support from their local authority. **However, the evidence indicates that some councils are failing to uphold this duty and denying young people not only access to wider housing assistance but also to emergency accommodation to which they are legally entitled.**

CASE STUDY 2: PREGNANT YOUNG PERSON

A 24-year-old young person who was six-month pregnant contacted the Helpline after being made homeless due to her family asking her to leave. The young person spent a night with nowhere to go, travelling on buses to keep herself warm. She approached her local council but was unable to access support. She was told that she wouldn't receive access to emergency accommodation until she had an assessment.

According to Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996, prior to an assessment, if the local housing authority has reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need, **they must make sure that the applicant is able to access emergency interim accommodation whilst making further enquiries into their situation.**

In the case of this young person, she is pregnant (therefore has a priority need), eligible to receive support through her immigration status and has a local connection to the council. **This should have been enough to trigger the duty for emergency accommodation.**

One of our Helpline Advice Workers contacted the council directly to clarify why this young person was unable to access the statutory support to which she is entitled. The council confirmed that they now have a policy where homelessness has arisen due to family breakdown, officers are required to conduct an in-person visit to the family home as part of the assessment process before any emergency accommodation can be provided.

As a result, despite being six months pregnant, this young person has been denied interim accommodation until such a visit takes place. This approach sets an **unreasonably high threshold for evidence**, given that the legal test at this stage is deliberately intended to be a low bar of simply whether there is reason to believe an applicant may be homeless and eligible for assistance. The council's policy not only creates a **barrier to accessing support** but also exposes the young person and her unborn child to significant risks to their health and wellbeing.

TYPES OF GATEKEEPING

We have identified rates of local authority gatekeeping by type, where possible. The type most reported has been **'young person refused assessment as not seen to be in priority need'**, with 139 cases between August 2024 - July 2025, representing 31 per cent of all gatekeeping instances in this period:

Type of Gatekeeping	Instances	%
YP refused assessment as not seen to be in priority need	139	31%
YP hasn't heard back from council after initial contact	84	19%
YP unable to make initial contact with council	59	13%
YP refused assessment as seen to have no local connection	49	11%
YP refused assessment as council cannot confirm homelessness (i.e. when council asks for telephone number of family member to confirm homelessness)	28	6%
Council asking for evidence before assessing (e.g. Mat B1 form)	17	4%
YP refused assessment as seen to be intentionally homeless	13	3%
YP seen not to be eligible for housing support (i.e. due to immigration status)	6	1%
YP has no ID	6	1%
Other	48	11%

Figure 1: Frequency and percentages of local authority gatekeeping by type, August 2024 – July 2025



PRIORITY NEED

Centrepoin't's Helpline staff report that many councils are **unfairly turning young people away from receiving an assessment** where they assume that the young person will not have a **priority need**. However, you do not need to have a priority need to get a homelessness assessment.

Under the HRA, everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days has the right to an assessment by the local council. Local authorities are not giving young people the opportunity to demonstrate their needs by failing to carry out homelessness assessments. The responsibility lies with the local authority to gather the necessary evidence promptly to determine whether the young person has a priority need. However, many young people are unaware of this and end up taking on the burden themselves when councils suggest that they provide the evidence. Local authorities should aim to make initial enquiries and decisions within a reasonable timeframe, with the initial threshold for forming a reason to believe that a young person may be homeless and eligible for assistance deliberately set low.

Councils are failing to provide the support to which young people are entitled - all young people experiencing homelessness are entitled to an assessment and appropriate assistance, regardless of priority status. At the same time, councils are often failing to recognise priority need for clearly vulnerable young people, including those who are pregnant or fleeing domestic abuse. This creates significant risks to the safety, health, and wellbeing of these young people and represents a serious breach of statutory duties relating to priority need.

Centrepoin't's Helpline reports that **councils frequently engage in this form of gatekeeping by requesting unreasonable evidence**, such as proof of pregnancy in the form of a MATB1 (which is only issued after 20 weeks), proof of domestic abuse that may put the young person at further risk, or extensive medical documentation. As a result, many vulnerable young people are unable to access the support they are legally entitled to.

Councils must be held accountable for fulfilling their duties, and staff must be properly informed and adequately resourced to ensure young people can access timely and appropriate homelessness support.





CASE STUDY 3: PRIORITY NEED

A 24-year-old young person approached the Helpline after fleeing domestic violence. She disclosed that she had been experiencing physical, emotional and financial abuse since her early teens and fled her family home the night before following a physical assault. She said she had found somewhere to stay over the weekend, but nothing after that.

The young person had approached the council where no homelessness assessment or interim accommodation was offered. Instead, the council told the young person to contact Centrepoin and also directed her to a homelessness outreach service.

In s.189(1)(e) Housing Act 1996, **a person has priority need for assistance if they are homeless as a result of fleeing domestic abuse.** This means that the council should have treated the young person as priority need. She should have been offered a homelessness assessment and had access to interim emergency accommodation.

This meant that the young person with no safe place to stay faced the risk of being forced to return to an abusive household, thereby exposing them to further physical, emotional, and financial harm.

CONTACT WITH THE COUNCIL

Local authorities have a duty to make their services accessible and ensure that people experiencing or at risk of homelessness can contact them easily for advice and support. However, **data from Centrepoin't's Helpline indicates that barriers to contacting local authorities are a common form of gatekeeping.** For example, young people frequently report being unable to reach their council by telephone and receiving no response to emails. In some areas, local authorities accept homelessness applications only via a single channel, such as an online form. This practice excludes young people without access to a computer or the internet and is inconsistent with statutory guidance that applications should be able to be made in any form.

In addition, **there were repeated instances where young people requiring interpreters were not provided with language support** when approaching their council for assistance. This not only fails to meet councils' equality obligations but also undermines the applicant's ability to understand and engage with the process, placing them at a distinct disadvantage.

Helpline Advisors have reported that restricting the routes through which young people can apply for support can appear deliberately exclusionary, seemingly aimed at reducing the number of people councils must assist. The Homelessness Code of Guidance makes clear that authorities must not adopt procedures that create barriers to making an application. While we acknowledge the severe funding pressures facing local authorities, such practices remain unlawful. **Stronger action is needed to ensure that councils comply with their statutory homelessness duties and that young people are not prevented from accessing the support they are entitled to.**

LOCAL CONNECTION

Centrepoin't's Helpline frequently receives reports of local authorities' **gatekeeping by turning away young people on the basis of not having a local connection.** Even if a young person does not have a local connection to a council area, the council is still legally required to accept their homelessness application and carry out a full assessment. This includes providing advice, support and assistance to prevent or relieve homelessness, developing a Personal Housing Plan, and helping the young person explore housing options.

While a council may not have a duty to provide long-term accommodation if the young person has a local connection elsewhere, it must still offer interim or temporary support until the case is referred to the appropriate council for the main housing duty. The absence of a local connection does not remove the council's responsibility to assess and assist the young person at the presentation stage. **Reports to the Helpline indicate that some councils are either avoiding these duties or are unclear about their obligations, placing young people at significant risk of homelessness.**





CASE STUDY 4: LOCAL CONNECTION

A 20-year-old young person contacted the Helpline reporting that they and their partner, who was eight weeks pregnant, were at risk of rough sleeping that night after being asked to leave the property where they had been sofa surfing for the past six months. Both have a local connection to their council: the young person through their own residency, and their partner through grandparents who have lived in the area for over five years.

When they contacted the council, they were told that the partner did not have a local connection because she had not lived in the area for two years. A Helpline Adviser informed them of their rights and encouraged them to contact the council again to emphasise that **they should be considered as having a local connection.**

CASE STUDY 5: LOCAL CONNECTION

A 25-year-old young person approached the council after being threatened with homelessness when they were asked to leave their sister's home where they had been living. The council stated that they could not provide assistance because she had only been in the area for one year.

However, under the law, she should only need to demonstrate six months' residence in the area to establish a local connection. A Helpline Adviser informed her of the support to which she is entitled and offered to submit a 'duty to refer' to the council in the hope that this would prompt them to carry out a homelessness assessment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings highlight a concerning **pattern of unlawful gatekeeping practices which place vulnerable young people at greater risk of homelessness**. To address this, local authorities require improved funding and resourcing, alongside increased staff awareness of the nature of youth homelessness and the statutory support they are required to provide.

WE RECOMMEND THAT:

The Government should provide ringfenced funding to local authorities in England to ensure that all young people who report to homelessness support services receive an assessment and support if required.

We estimated that in 2023/34 local authorities needed at least an additional funding allocation of **£400 million** to cover the costs of meeting their HRA duties for young people. [iv]

The Government should develop a funding allocation, that is proportionate to local need, for local authorities to spend on homelessness services, encouraging local authorities to not divert this funding to other services.

The Government should work with young people and the youth homelessness sector to write and implement a youth-specific chapter in the Homelessness Code of Guidance.

This chapter should clarify the obligations of local authorities at the presentation, initial interview and assessment stages to ensure that all local authorities are aware of what is and is not acceptable practice. In doing this, the chapter should delineate a) the factors a local authority must consider and b) what constitutes a realistic burden of proof when the Homelessness Code of Guidance states that a local authority must only have “reason to believe” a person is homeless or at risk to get an assessment.

Ministry of Housing Community and Local Government should increase oversight and monitoring of local authority implementation and practices related to the implementation of the HRA when tackling youth homelessness.

Improved Government scrutiny over how local authorities provide homelessness assessments and services would improve adherence to best practices, maintain consistent standards, and address any gaps in service provision to tackle youth homelessness.



REFERENCES

[i] Centrepont (2025) Hidden In Plain Sight: Understanding Youth Homelessness in the UK: <https://centrepont.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/Centrepont%20Databank%20Full%20Report%202023-2024.pdf>

[ii] Centrepont (2025) Hidden In Plain Sight: Understanding Youth Homelessness in the UK: <https://centrepont.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/Centrepont%20Databank%20Full%20Report%202023-2024.pdf>

[iii] Centrepont (2025) Waiting For The Next Blow-up: Family Breakdown and Youth Homelessness: https://centrepont.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/D474%20Family%20Breakdown%20Report%20A4%20V4A%20SCREEN%20ACCESSIBLE%20SINGLES_0.pdf

iv] Centrepont (2025) No Young Person Left Out: Estimating The Local Authority Funding Needs To Support Young People Experiencing Homelessness: <https://centrepont.org.uk/research-reports/no-young-person-left-out>

APPENDIX

The below data refers to instances of gatekeeping, rather than young people impacted by gatekeeping. A young person can experience gatekeeping more than once.

Total number of gatekeeping instances

August 2023 - July 2024		August 2024 - July 2025		Year on year increase in instances
Instances	Rate	Instances	Rate	
440	11%	449	10%	2%

Gatekeeping instances by parental status

Has Children?	Instances	Rate
NA	202	8%
No	193	12%
No - Child in Somebody Else's Care	6	12%
Pregnant or with children	48	14%

Gatekeeping instances by gender

	August 2023 - July 2024	August 2024 - July 2025
Gender	Instances	Instances
Female	208	179
Male	146	147
NA	80	122
Non-Binary	5	1
Other	1	0
Gender Fluid	0	0