Research Report



LOCAL AUTHORITY GATEKEEPING

August 2025 – July 2026

CENTRE POINT
ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Registered Charity No. 292411



Summary

Centrepoint's latest research highlights persistent systemic barriers preventing young people from accessing statutory homelessness assistance. Between August 2025 and July 2026, the Centrepoint Helpline recorded 284 instances of gatekeeping, while 68% of surveyed partner organisations reported that they had witnessed these practices quite or very frequently. Common barriers included poor communication, delays in assessments, and young people being incorrectly turned away on the grounds of priority need or local connection. Young people experiencing domestic abuse were particularly at risk of being denied support, with evidence that councils do not consistently apply the legal protections available to survivors.

These findings reflect wider pressures on homelessness services, including high caseloads, insufficient staffing and shortages of suitable temporary, supported and affordable housing. Centrepoint is calling on the Government to ensure sustained, needs-based funding for local authorities, review how homelessness duties are implemented, strengthen guidance and oversight, and ensure young people can access independent advocacy. Without action to address both service capacity and housing supply, young people will continue to face barriers to accessing the assessments, accommodation and support to which they are legally entitled.

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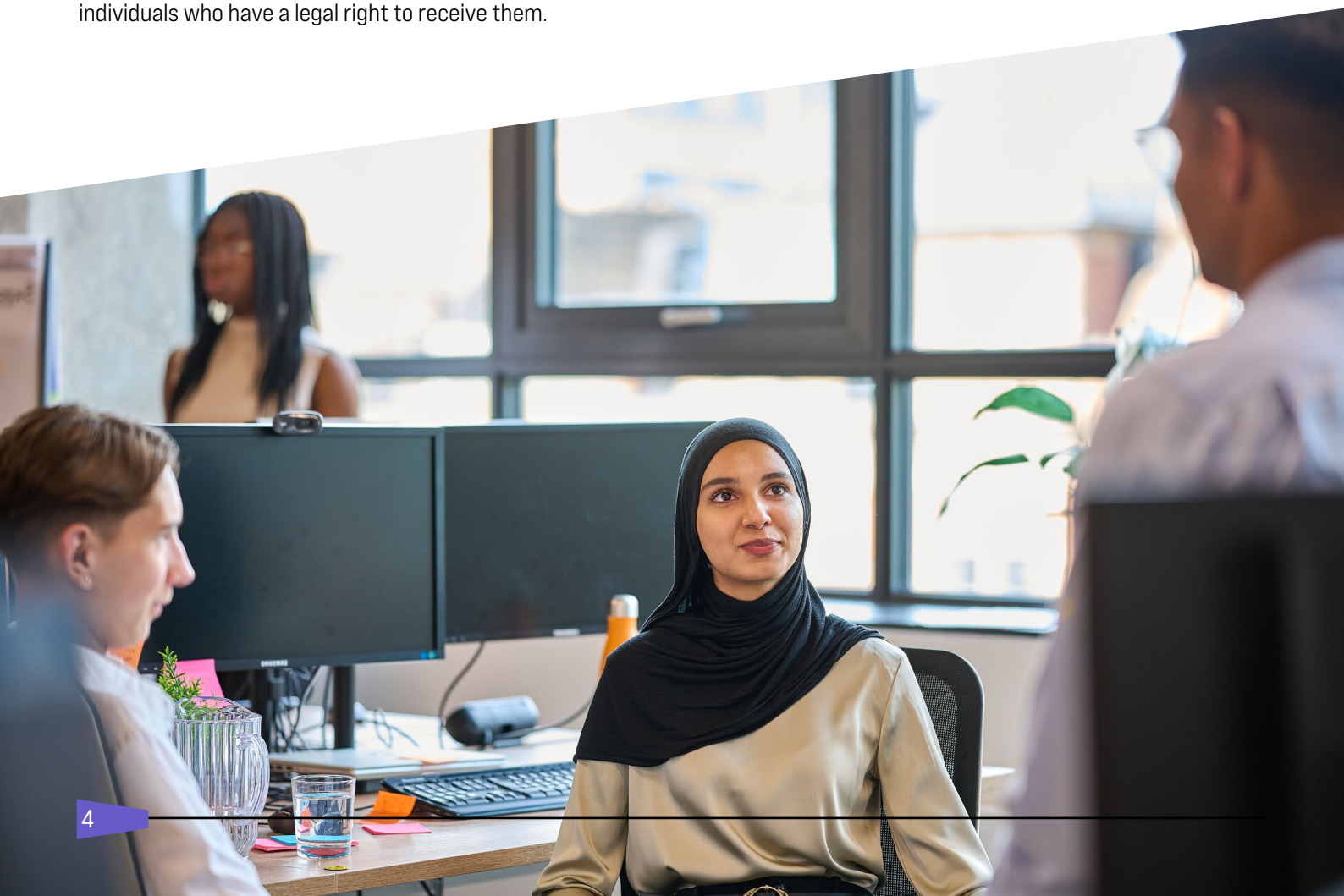
Introduction

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), local authorities in England have a statutory duty to assess anyone who approaches them for assistance because they are homeless or at risk of homelessness. However, Centrepoint's latest Youth Homelessness Databank found that over a third of young people who sought help from their local authority in 2024/25 did not receive a homelessness assessment.[1] While some of this gap may reflect young people not meeting the eligibility threshold for assessment and support, evidence shows that systemic barriers within local authority processes are also preventing young people from accessing the support to which they may be entitled.[2,3]



This report adds to the body of evidence. Data from Centrepoint's Youth Homelessness Helpline collected between August 2024 and July 2026 highlights persistent systemic barriers to accessing homelessness assistance, with gatekeeping continuing to undermine the effective delivery of statutory duties. This data is supplemented by a survey completed by 25 Centrepoint partner organisations based across 80 local authority areas (conducted between 14th – 27th July 2026), and interviews with two local authorities in England. The analysis examines patterns of gatekeeping across the homelessness system, including trends over time and variations in the types of gatekeeping experienced by young people.

Gatekeeping refers to the failure of local authorities to provide a homelessness assessment and/or support to individuals who have a legal right to receive them.



Findings

Between August 2025 and July 2026, Centrepoint's Helpline supported 5,446 young people aged 16-25, alongside family members and friends seeking advice on their behalf. Providing support via phone, webchat, WhatsApp and email, Helpline Advisers routinely identify cases where access to statutory homelessness assistance is denied through local authority practices. During this period, the Helpline recorded 284 instances of gatekeeping, with 6 per cent of relevant calls involving reports of young people being denied access to homelessness support. While this represents a 37 per cent decrease from the 449 instances recorded during the same period the previous year, gatekeeping remained a feature of calls to the Helpline, showing that barriers to accessing statutory homelessness assistance continue to be embedded within some local authority systems despite the overall reduction in cases reported.

Over two thirds of organisations that responded to the survey (68 per cent) had witnessed gatekeeping practices quite frequently or very frequently. In contrast to the Helpline findings, over half (52 per cent) of respondents said they have found gatekeeping to be more or much more of an issue for young people in the past year, with zero respondents saying that it had become less of an issue.

The data from these sources shows that gatekeeping is stubbornly persistent, and this data represents only those cases that are brought to Centrepoint's attention. Young people who are incorrectly turned away may not always recognise that they have been gatekept, may not know where to access advocacy, or may disengage from services entirely. The cases heard by the Helpline represent only the tip of the iceberg, with the true prevalence of gatekeeping much higher.

Gatekeeping rates recorded by the Helpline varied substantially across local authority areas, ranging from 3 per cent to 50 per cent. However, much of this variation was driven by locations with small numbers of contacts. Among locations with at least 20 helpline contacts (17 out of 64 total local authorities), gatekeeping rates ranged from 4 per cent to 13 per cent, indicating considerable but less extreme variation in experiences of access to homelessness support. While the Helpline figures for individual areas were often based on relatively small numbers of contacts, the survey captured experiences across 80 local authority areas, including cities, urban and suburban areas, smaller towns and rural communities. Coverage was strongest in the North West, with representation across the South East, South West, East of England, East Midlands and West Midlands, but no responses relating to local authorities in London, the North East, or Yorkshire and the Humber.

Centrepoint and WPI Economics' latest analysis shows that in FY 2024-2025, local authorities experienced a combined shortfall in funding of £325 million, compared to what they would have needed to deliver homelessness support to every young person who approached them.[4] Interviews with local authority staff highlighted the combined pressures facing homelessness services. One interviewee linked difficulties providing timely assessments and follow-up support to officers carrying high caseloads, while both interviews emphasised that councils' ability to assist young people is also constrained by shortages of suitable temporary, supported and affordable housing.

Recent investment may help councils strengthen staffing, assessment and prevention services. Homelessness Prevention Grant funding increased to £694.17 million in 2025/26, an uplift of £253.8 million compared with the previous year, and the Government has committed to increasing spending on homelessness support to £3.5 billion. One local authority interviewee described how increased funding had supported service restructuring and the development of specialist prevention functions, including youth-focused services. They suggested that previous financial pressures may have created incentives to minimise demand through gatekeeping, while greater investment had enabled the authority to place more emphasis on early intervention.

> **"We used that [funding] to kind of reshape the service a bit... The service is now kind of split into different areas. So like a specialist prevention team and a specialist relief team."**
>
> **– Local authority staff member**

However, both local authorities also emphasised that carrying out assessments is only one part of the homelessness system. Even where young people are able to access assessments and support, accommodation pathways are often severely constrained. Interviewees described shortages of supported accommodation, temporary accommodation, social housing and private rented accommodation that is increasingly unaffordable for young people. While these issues are distinct from gatekeeping itself, they place significant pressure on local homelessness systems and limit councils' ability to provide young people with timely and appropriate housing support once they have entered the system.

The Government's plans to protect prevention and relief activities by moving temporary accommodation funding out of the Homelessness Prevention Grant are welcome. As the new funding arrangements are implemented, the Government should ensure that councils receive sufficient and sustained funding based on local levels of need, while also taking action to expand the supply of temporary, supported and genuinely affordable housing. Without improvements to both service capacity and housing supply, young people may continue to face barriers to having their needs assessed and receiving suitable accommodation and support to resolve their homelessness.

Types of gatekeeping

We have identified rates of local authority gatekeeping by type, where possible. The type most reported has been 'hasn't heard back from council after initial contact', with 68 cases between August 2025 - July 2026, representing 24 per cent of all gatekeeping instances in this period:

Type of Gatekeeping	Gatekeeping Instances	%
Young person hasn't heard back from council after initial contact	68	24%
Young person unable to make initial contact with council	45	16%
Young person refused assessment as not seen to be in priority need	36	13%
Young person refused assessment as seen to have no local connection	34	12%
Young person refused assessment as council cannot confirm homelessness	15	5%
Council asking for evidence before assessing (e.g. Mat B1 form)	13	5%
Young person has no ID	3	1%
Young person refused assessment as seen to be intentionally homeless	3	1%
Other	67	24%

Figure 1: Frequency and percentages of local authority gatekeeping by type, August 2025 – July 2026



Contact with the council

The Homelessness Code of Guidance states that local authorities should provide access to homelessness advice and assistance during normal office hours, maintain arrangements for out-of-hours emergency support, publicise how services can be accessed, and recognise homelessness applications made in any form. However, Centrepoint's evidence over many years shows that weaknesses in communication channels and service accessibility continue to prevent these expectations from being consistently implemented in practice.

Difficulties engaging with local authority homelessness services are a significant systemic issue as evidenced by Centrepoint's Helpline data, with problems contacting the council accounting for 40 per cent of all reported instances of gatekeeping. Young people frequently report being unable to get through by telephone, receiving no response to emails, or being unable to obtain updates on their case. Reliance on a single access route, such as an online form, can indicate wider challenges in service accessibility. Where homelessness services lack multiple, clearly communicated pathways for engagement, young people may face additional barriers to accessing support and maintaining contact with their local authority.

One local authority staff member argued that communication issues can be a symptom of wider pressures within homelessness systems. Increasing demand, high caseloads and limited service capacity can reduce the time available for follow-up work, ongoing communication and prevention activity, as staff prioritise urgent presentations and immediate housing crises.

"If local authorities are looking for an excuse to not assess someone, not assist them, or they don't have capacity to respond, it's likely as a result of the fact that their officers are overburdened, that they have too few officers with too many cases."

– Local authority staff member

The data illustrates weaknesses in local authority service accessibility, communication processes and case management systems. Where applicants cannot easily make contact, receive timely responses or understand the progress of their application, there is a risk that local authorities are unable to fulfil their statutory homelessness duties effectively, including the provision of interim accommodation where appropriate. While local authorities continue to face significant resource pressures, stronger oversight is needed to ensure homelessness services remain accessible and responsive, particularly for young people seeking support. This is essential to ensure that young people can access the support and accommodation to which they are entitled.



Case study 1: Contact with the council

A young person was forced to leave the family home due to domestic abuse and made a homelessness application to a different London borough. At the point of application, they provided evidence of the abuse, including a police reference number and confirmation of engagement with family justice services. Despite this, the young person was not contacted by the local authority for over a month after submitting their application.

Following brief contact from the authority, there was a further period of more than a month with no communication or update on the progress of the case. The Homelessness Code of Guidance states that authorities should ensure homelessness services are accessible and responsive, and that applicants are properly informed throughout the process., Prolonged periods without contact can leave them unable to understand what action is being taken or what support they may be entitled to.

Case study 2: Contact with the council

Since being forced into homelessness, a young person had been sofa surfing and moving between temporary arrangements, leaving them without secure or settled accommodation.

The young person approached their council for assistance and was awaiting a homelessness assessment. However, over a period of five months, their assessment appointment was repeatedly postponed, preventing them from progressing their application or accessing the support that may have been available to them. Under the Housing Act 1996, local authorities are required to make inquiries where they have reason to believe an applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness.

This case highlights the impact that delays within assessment and case management systems can have on young people experiencing homelessness. Despite presenting as homeless and living in prolonged housing insecurity, the young person remained without an assessment for five months, delaying access to the support and housing options that may have been available to them

Priority need

Centrepoint'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. These cases account for 13 per cent of all gatekeeping instances recorded by the Helpline and 68 per cent of organisations that responded to the survey reported witnessing this practice in the past year. This is despite the fact that duties introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, outline that all eligible applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days are entitled to an assessment of their circumstances and housing needs. Local authorities should not rely on assumptions about priority need as a basis for limiting access to statutory homelessness assessments.

Where homelessness assessments are not carried out at the earliest stage, young people may be prevented from demonstrating the full extent of their needs and circumstances. The duty to make inquiries and gather relevant information rests with the local authority, and the threshold for establishing a reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless and eligible for assistance is intentionally low. Delays in making inquiries or an overreliance on applicants to obtain evidence themselves can create barriers to accessing support.

Centrepoint's evidence also shows that factors associated with priority need are not always consistently identified through local authority processes. This includes young people who are pregnant, experienced domestic abuse, or experiencing other circumstances that may indicate a priority need. Where these factors are not recognised promptly, young people may miss out on the assessments, interim accommodation and support that homelessness legislation is intended to provide, increasing risks to their safety and wellbeing.

Additionally, local authority staff indicated that there may be significant variation in how the "reason to believe" threshold is interpreted and applied in practice. One local authority staff member described "reason to believe" as a deliberately low threshold, arguing that local authorities should act on the information provided by an applicant, undertake inquiries, and gather further evidence as the case progresses. They suggested that requiring extensive evidence before taking action is contrary to the intention of homelessness legislation, particularly where young people may be fleeing domestic abuse or at risk in other ways. While a different local authority staff member described a more structured approach to collecting information and documentation at an early stage to inform decision-making and avoid delays later in the process. Both approaches were intended to support effective case assessment, the differences identified through these interviews suggest that young people may encounter varying evidential expectations depending on the authority they approach. This reinforces the need for clear guidance and oversight to ensure the "reason to believe" threshold is applied consistently and does not become a barrier to accessing assessments, inquiries or interim accommodation.





Local connection

Centrepoint's Helpline frequently receives reports of young people being turned away from homelessness services on the grounds that they are not considered to have a local connection to the area, accounting for 12 per cent of recorded gatekeeping cases. Additionally, 40 per cent of organisations that responded to the survey reported witnessing this form of gatekeeping in the past year. These cases raise concerns about the consistent application of homelessness duties, as local authorities are required to accept homelessness applications and assess applicants' circumstances regardless of whether a local connection exists. A lack of local connection may be relevant to any subsequent referral process, but it should not prevent a young person from accessing an assessment, a Personal Housing Plan, or support to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

Local authority interviewees suggested that challenges relating to local connection are often driven by wider pressures within homelessness systems. One interviewee described local authorities as "kind of passing the buck to one another", arguing that responsibility for supporting applicants can become disputed between authorities rather than resolved through the homelessness process. Another highlighted the role that limited housing supply, temporary accommodation pressures and wider resource constraints can play in shaping decisions about whether an authority accepts responsibility for a homelessness application or seeks to establish a local connection elsewhere. These findings suggest that local connection disputes can sometimes become a mechanism through which pressure is transferred between authorities, rather than resolved in the best interests of the young person. As a result, young people may face delays, confusion and barriers to accessing support despite the legal framework requiring local authorities to assess and assist applicants regardless of local connection at the point of presentation.

While the legal framework for local connection is consistent across England, local authority staff highlighted significant variation in how local connection provisions are interpreted and applied in practice. One interviewee described "the inconsistency with which those duties are applied" as "frankly mind boggling", suggesting that differences in local policies, operational processes and interpretations of statutory guidance can result in young people receiving very different responses depending on the authority they approach. Similar concerns emerged within survey responses, with one respondent highlighting "inconsistency in staff knowledge and decision-making, which can lead to varying outcomes for young people seeking assistance and delays in accessing appropriate support." Together, these findings suggest a broader challenge around the consistency with which homelessness duties are implemented across local homelessness systems.

Local connection provides one example of how these inconsistencies can affect young people's access to support. Where local connection is treated as a gateway test rather than a consideration within the assessment process, young people can be prevented from accessing the support to which they are legally entitled. These gatekeeping practices can leave young people without assistance at a critical point of need and increase the risk that homelessness goes unresolved while responsibility for the case remains disputed between authorities.

Domestic abuse

Between August 2025 and July 2026, Centrepoint's Helpline recorded 65 instances of gatekeeping involving young people affected by domestic abuse, representing 11 per cent of all domestic abuse-related calls. These findings illustrate systemic weaknesses in how homelessness services identify, assess and respond to domestic abuse among young people. This reflects findings from Centrepoint's recent research into domestic abuse, which identified barriers across housing and safeguarding systems that can prevent young survivors from accessing a safe home.[5]

Young people experiencing domestic abuse are entitled to a range of additional protections under homelessness legislation, including priority need status where they are vulnerable as a result of domestic abuse. They should also not be referred to another local authority on local connection grounds where they or a member of their household would be at risk of domestic abuse in that area. Regardless of priority need or local connection, all applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness should receive an assessment of their circumstances. However, Centrepoint's evidence shows that these protections are not consistently implemented in practice, resulting in some young people being unable to access the support and accommodation to which they are entitled.

Centrepoint's recent research found that local authorities may not recognise familial abuse, instead viewing young people as creating difficulties with family members and, in some cases, advising them to return home or reconcile with relatives who may be perpetrating the abuse.[6] It also identified gaps in understanding of non-physical forms of abuse, including financial, psychological, honour-based and online abuse. Failures to identify domestic abuse can have significant consequences, including young people not being considered for interim accommodation because local authorities do not recognise that there may be reason to believe they are in priority need.

The instances heard by the Helpline highlight concerns regarding evidential requirements. In some cases, young people are asked to provide proof of domestic abuse that is difficult or unreasonable to obtain, creating additional barriers to accessing support. Centrepoint's recent research similarly found that young survivors may be asked to provide evidence of police involvement or a crime reference number, despite the Homelessness Code of Guidance advising against a blanket requirement for corroborative or police evidence.[7] Professionals also reported invasive practices such as requests to examine young people's private phone messages. Such approaches can be retraumatising and may place young people at further risk by effectively requiring them to re-engage with perpetrators or unsafe environments to secure evidence. Local authorities should instead apply the appropriately low "reason to believe" threshold and take a trauma-informed approach that respects and seeks to understand young people's experiences without unnecessarily intruding on their privacy.

Case study 3: Domestic abuse

A young person was forced to leave their home due to domestic abuse perpetrated by a family member and approached their local authority for housing assistance. They were informed that they were not homeless and did not meet the threshold for support, and no homelessness assessment was offered. This indicates that the local authority had not appropriately considered its duties under section 184 of the Housing Act 1996, which requires local authorities to make inquiries where they have reason to believe an applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness. A young person who has fled domestic abuse would generally be expected to trigger further inquiries into their circumstances and housing needs. In addition, where an authority has reason to believe an applicant may be homeless, eligible and in priority need, it must secure interim accommodation pending its inquiries.

This case highlights how weaknesses in initial triage and assessment processes can result in vulnerable young people not accessing the homelessness protections they may be entitled to. The absence of timely support and accommodation, may force them to rely on insecure housing options or return to environments where they face a continued risk of abuse or harm.

Case study 4: Domestic abuse and local connection

A young person was forced to leave their home following many years of familial abuse. With support from Centrepoint's Helpline, they made a homelessness application to a different local authority because they did not feel safe returning to the area where their family lived. However, they were told they did not have a local connection to the area, and their circumstances were classified as family breakdown rather than domestic abuse. This raises concerns about the consistent identification of domestic abuse within homelessness assessments, as homelessness legislation and guidance are clear that applicants at risk of domestic abuse should not be referred to another authority on local connection grounds where doing so would place them at risk.

This case highlights the importance of accurately identifying domestic abuse and correctly applying local connection provisions. Where abuse is mischaracterised as family breakdown, there is a risk that applicants are incorrectly considered for referral back to an area where they do not feel safe. This can undermine the protections intended by legislation, which recognises that survivors of domestic abuse should be able to seek assistance in a different area without being required to return to a location where they may face further harm or fear of harm.

The Helpline Legal Clinic

Centrepoint Helpline advisers spend significant time challenging local authority decisions, securing assessments that were not initially offered, and attempting to contact councils on behalf of young people who are unable to access the support they may be entitled to. Rather than helping young people navigate the homelessness system, advisers are increasingly required to intervene where that system is not functioning as intended.

In response, Centrepoint launched the Helpline Legal Clinic in partnership with Shelter and the London School of Economics. The Clinic provides specialist legal support in cases where young people appear to have been wrongly denied assistance, helping to challenge gatekeeping practices and secure access to homelessness assessments, accommodation and other statutory support. It has supported young people facing a range of circumstances, including domestic abuse, rough sleeping and family breakdown.

The need for specialist advocacy and legal intervention to access basic homelessness assistance demonstrates the impact of gatekeeping on young people. This is particularly concerning given that 32 per cent of survey respondents said that, in their experience, very few or no young people are aware of the support they are entitled to. When systems rely on young people identifying and challenging incorrect decisions themselves, there is a significant risk that unmet needs go unaddressed. Young people should not have to rely on external organisations to have to advocate for their statutory rights before receiving support. Where homelessness systems are functioning effectively, assessments and assistance should be accessible without the need for escalation, advocacy or legal challenge.

Case study 5: Helpline Legal Clinic

When a young person contacted Centrepoint's Helpline, they had been sleeping in their car after being assessed by their local authority as not being in priority need. They subsequently provided evidence from their hospital consultant confirming that they have a rare genetic condition that causes chronic infections and breathing difficulties. The local authority revised its decision and accepted that they were in priority need, meaning accommodation duties were owed. However, despite having this information and changing its decision, the authority had not offered accommodation and the young person was unable to contact their housing officer.

The Helpline referred the young person to the Helpline Legal Clinic, where they received legal advice and a letter of representation was sent to the local authority. Within 10 days, they were offered accommodation in the private rented sector on a 24-month assured shorthold tenancy, which they accepted.

While this demonstrates the value of specialist legal advocacy, it also raises concerns about local authority case management and implementation of homelessness duties. The local authority had already received the evidence needed to determine that the young person was in priority need, and the young person should not have had to rely on legal intervention to secure accommodation.

Case study 6: Helpline Legal Clinic

When a young person contacted Centrepoint's Helpline, she was 30 weeks pregnant and sleeping on the floor at a friend's home. Her friend had asked her to leave within five days. She had previously been assessed by the local authority and, as a pregnant person, would ordinarily be considered to have a priority need for accommodation. However, she had received neither a written decision nor any further communication from the authority following her assessment.

Following a referral to the Helpline Legal Clinic, the young person received legal advice and an urgent letter of representation was sent to the local authority. Less than two weeks later, she was offered temporary accommodation.

This case demonstrates the important role that advocacy can play in helping young people access their rights, but it also highlights wider challenges in communication and case progression processes. The local authority was already aware of the young person's pregnancy and had carried out an assessment, yet support was only provided after legal intervention. Young people in circumstances that clearly indicate vulnerability should not have to chase decisions or seek specialist legal support in order to access the homelessness assistance they are entitled to.



Conclusion

The data from Centrepoint's Helpline and survey findings highlight a range of systemic barriers that can prevent young people from accessing homelessness assessments and support. Addressing these issues will require a combination of sufficient resourcing, clear guidance, effective oversight, and consistent implementation of statutory duties to ensure homelessness services are accessible, responsive and equipped to meet the needs of young people. While sustained funding is essential, it will only go so far without effective implementation and accountability. The Government must ensure statutory guidance is consistently put into practice and introduce regular monitoring of local authorities to ensure homelessness duties are being met.



Recommendations

The Government should provide sufficient 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.

While recent significant increases in homelessness funding are very welcome, continued investment is needed to ensure local authorities can meet their statutory duties to young people. The Government should keep homelessness funding under review to ensure resources reflect local levels of need, including demand for youth homelessness services. It should also monitor how Homelessness Prevention Grant funding is being used across different age groups to ensure local authorities have sufficient capacity to deliver effective prevention, relief and assessment services for young people.

The Government should undertake a review of how local authorities assess young people experiencing homelessness and implement their duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The review should examine the consistency of assessment practices, the application of statutory duties, and the barriers preventing young people from accessing homelessness assessments and support. Once complete, there should be continuous monitoring and oversight of local authority homelessness services to ensure young people can access assessments and support in line with statutory requirements. This should pay particular attention to assessment rates, waiting times, communication with applicants, homelessness outcomes, and complaints relating to homelessness applications, and identifying and addressing gatekeeping practices.

The Government should monitor adherence to the new Youth Chapter of the Homelessness Code of Guidance to ensure that local authorities are paying due regard to the specific experiences of young people.

The Government should strengthen guidance on the "reason to believe" threshold to ensure young people are not denied assessments, inquiries or interim accommodation because of unnecessarily high evidential requirements.

Guidance should make clear that the threshold is intentionally low and that local authorities are responsible for making inquiries into an applicant's circumstances once that threshold has been met.

Local authorities should ensure young people experiencing homelessness are informed about and supported to access independent advocacy at an early stage of the homelessness process.

This would support implementation of the new Youth Chapter of the Homelessness Code of Guidance, which says young people should be informed about and able to access independent advocacy where available. Advocacy can help young people understand their rights, engage with services and challenge incorrect decisions before issues escalate. Particular consideration should be given to young people who may face additional barriers to navigating the system, including 16- and 17-year-olds and young people experiencing domestic abuse.



Glossary

Application

The statutory homelessness process in England 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.

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