Youth Homelessness in Scotland 2015

An overview of youth homelessness and homelessness services in Scotland

February 2016

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About Homeless Action Scotland

Homeless Action Scotland is the national membership body in Scotland for organisations and individuals tackling homelessness. Our members include voluntary sector providers, housing associations, local authorities (LAs), academics and other professionals involved in homelessness prevention and alleviation.

We have been in existence for over forty years. During that period Homeless Action Scotland (formerly Scottish Council for Single Homeless) has evolved from a volunteer based organisation focused on ending the provision of traditional night shelters to a professional, staffed, membership organisation – part of the 'second tier' of voluntary sector bodies. Historically, SCSH focused on single people but now as Homeless Action Scotland seeks to cover all issues relating to homelessness in Scotland.

Homeless Action Scotland exists to highlight the needs of homeless people and offer practical ideas and information to tackle homelessness. To do this, we work closely with our membership which includes local authorities, voluntary organisations, housing associations, health bodies, academics and individuals.

Sharing the knowledge and experience of our members is a key role for Homeless Action Scotland. We seek to disseminate relevant information quickly and effectively through our monthly newsletter and our website[i]. Our events programme ranges from our highly successful National Homelessness Conference which can attract over 150 delegates each year to smaller information meetings, briefings and consultations covering a wide variety of topics.

Introduction & Methodology

Each year Homeless Action Scotland carries out a survey of professionals from a range of disciplines in order to get a picture of how services view the state of homelessness across the country. For the past two years the survey itself has been very much based on quantitative data, e.g., service throughput, types of service user, and ages of young people accessing services. This year's survey focuses more on qualitative data, what you think, where you can see changes, and why you think that is. This was done in response to reactions to and feedback from the previous surveys, and in order to reduce duplication from other available resources and Scottish Government reports.

The basis of the report is returned data provided via an online survey. The survey goes out to the entire distribution list of Homeless Action Scotland and is promoted via the "In House" newsletter and the Homeless Action Scotland website. Other partners of Homeless Action Scotland work with us in order to distribute the survey to the widest range of possible contributors. It is acknowledged however that not all parties who receive the survey will have a professional interest in youth homelessness. This year over 140 people participated in the survey, of whom over 70 gave very full and detailed qualitative responses. This is the largest number of participants with the most detail to date and demonstrates a strong interest in youth homelessness and homelessness prevention.

Profile

Responses to the survey were received from a wide range of organisations: just under 50% were from local authorities, primarily from departments such as housing advice, housing options, homelessness services, social work, social care and thoughcare/aftercare. Just under;

> 37% of responses came from voluntary organisations,
> 11% from housing associations and just under
> 3% from health.

Do you work for...

- Local Authority
- Voluntary Organisation
- Housing Association
- Health
- Other
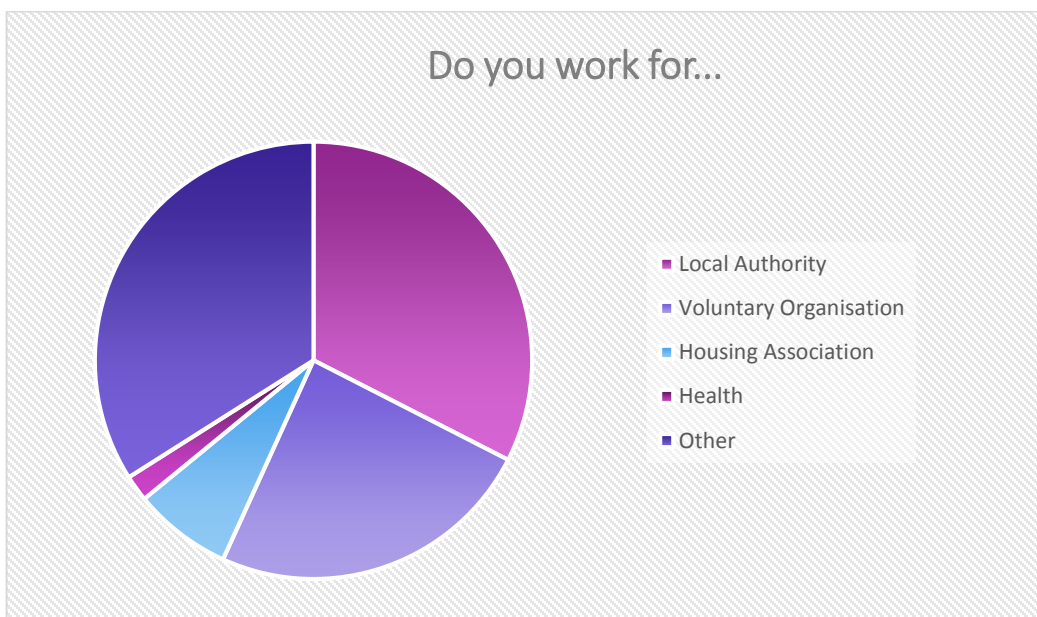
Most responses were from frontline workers across all pay scales and responsibilities, with policy and strategic roles making up the second largest group. Additional responses also came from volunteers and MPs. Of those workers who responded;

> 48% described themselves as frontline workers,
> 19% saw themselves in strategic roles, and
> 7% were in associated policy related work.

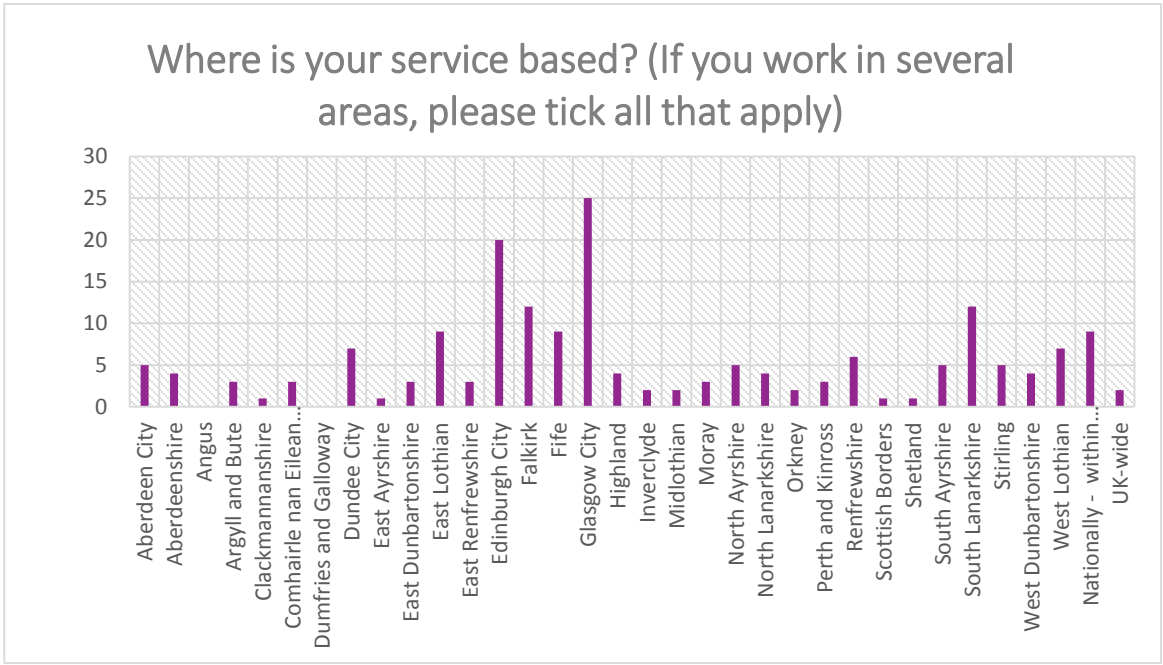## What is your job role? (You may give more than one answer)

This is the highest proportion of frontline workers yet to respond to the survey.

The predominant area of work for all involved came under the bracket of homeless services and housing support. From these areas respondents primarily worked within temporary and supported accommodation, advice and support. Significant contributions also came from people working within throughcare as well as those working within addictions and recovery.

Geographically, responses were distributed widely across Scotland. Although the survey went out to all areas, two regions did not submit any responses: Angus and Dumfries and Galloway. Despite this, all areas were included as several national bodies who work with those local authorities were included in the survey responses. As might be expected, the largest proportion of responses came from Glasgow and Edinburgh local authority areas, with Dundee, Falkirk, Fife and South Lanarkshire also responding in high numbers.

Of the 37 unique services who responded with quantitative data 5923 young people were recorded to have approached them for assistance, with 13 respondents not recording their data, but estimating a throughput of around 1000 further young people. The Scottish Government ad hoc Analysis of Youth Homelessness[1] for the same reporting period records 8229 young people making a homeless application and who were subsequently assessed as homeless. Although some of the services responding with this survey work only with young people who are already homeless, and others with preventing young people from homelessness, the data collected nonetheless represents a significant number of services within Scotland who work with young people engaged with homelessness.

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[1] http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/adhoc-analysis/youthhomeless201415

Where is your service based? (If you work in several areas, please tick all that apply)

When looking at the breakdown of young people approaching services, it can be observed that a significant number have diagnosed/undiagnosed mental health conditions. Others over-represented within the population are those who have been formerly looked after, those who are young parents and those with mental or physical disabilities (including learning difficulties). LGBTQI and black or minority ethnic young people are also disproportionately represented, however not all organisations record ethnicity or sexual identities.

Of these; How many young people approaching your service were...
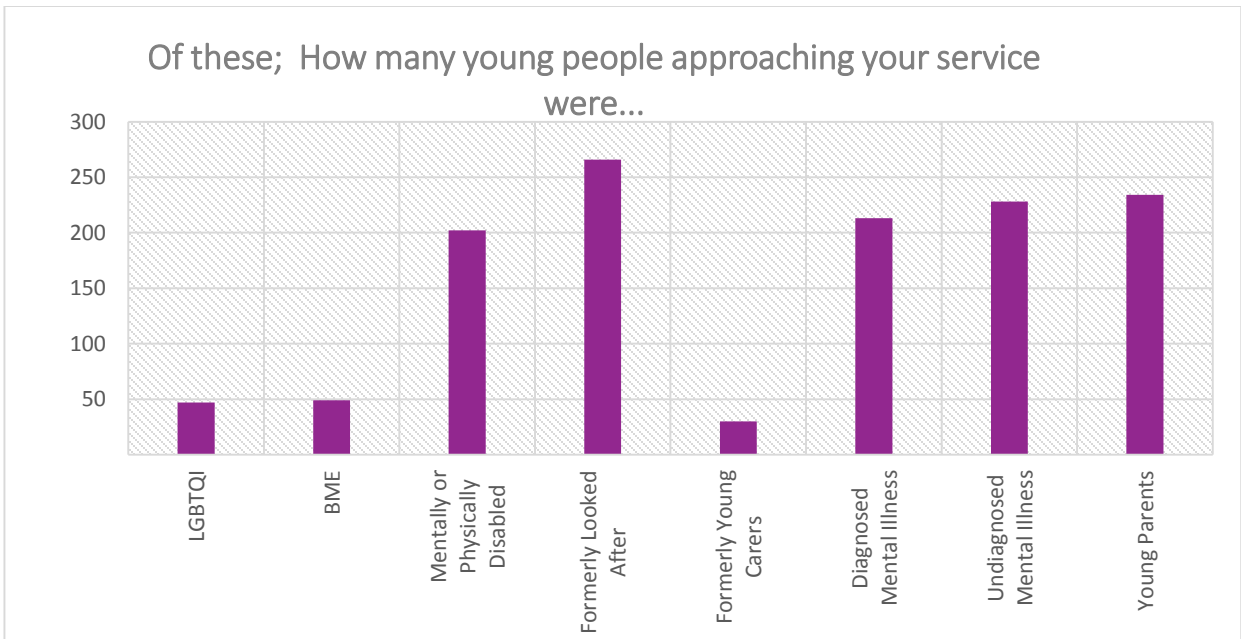
CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS
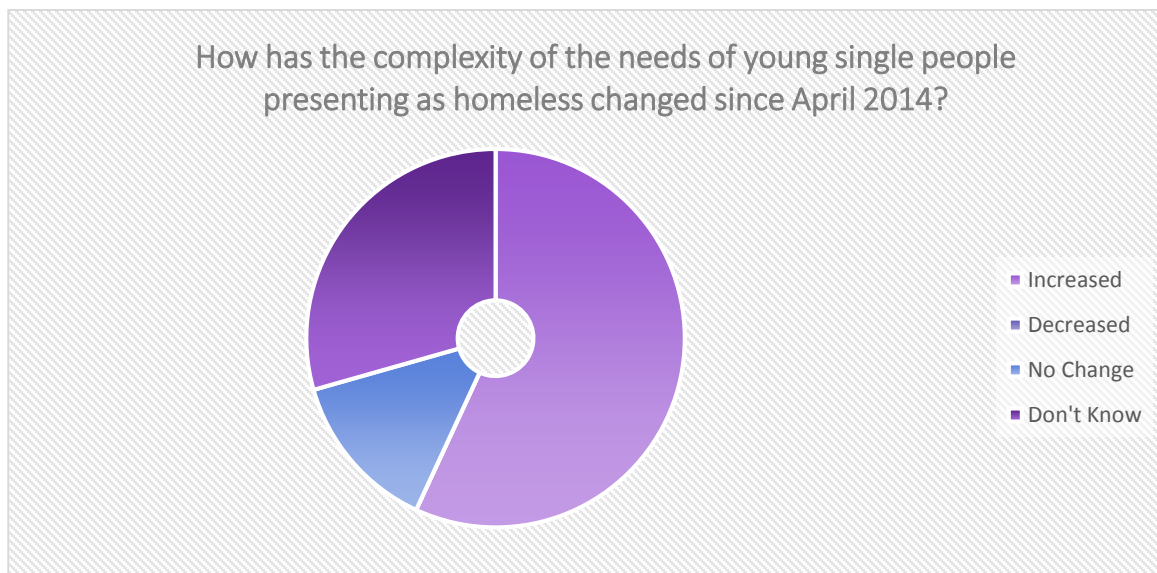
Relationship breakdown, drug and alcohol issues and mental or physical ill health remain the largest causes of homelessness, however an increase in financial problems caused by changes to benefits and rent or mortgage arrears can be seen when compared to previous surveys.

How have the numbers of young people experiencing the following causes of homelessness changed since April 2014?
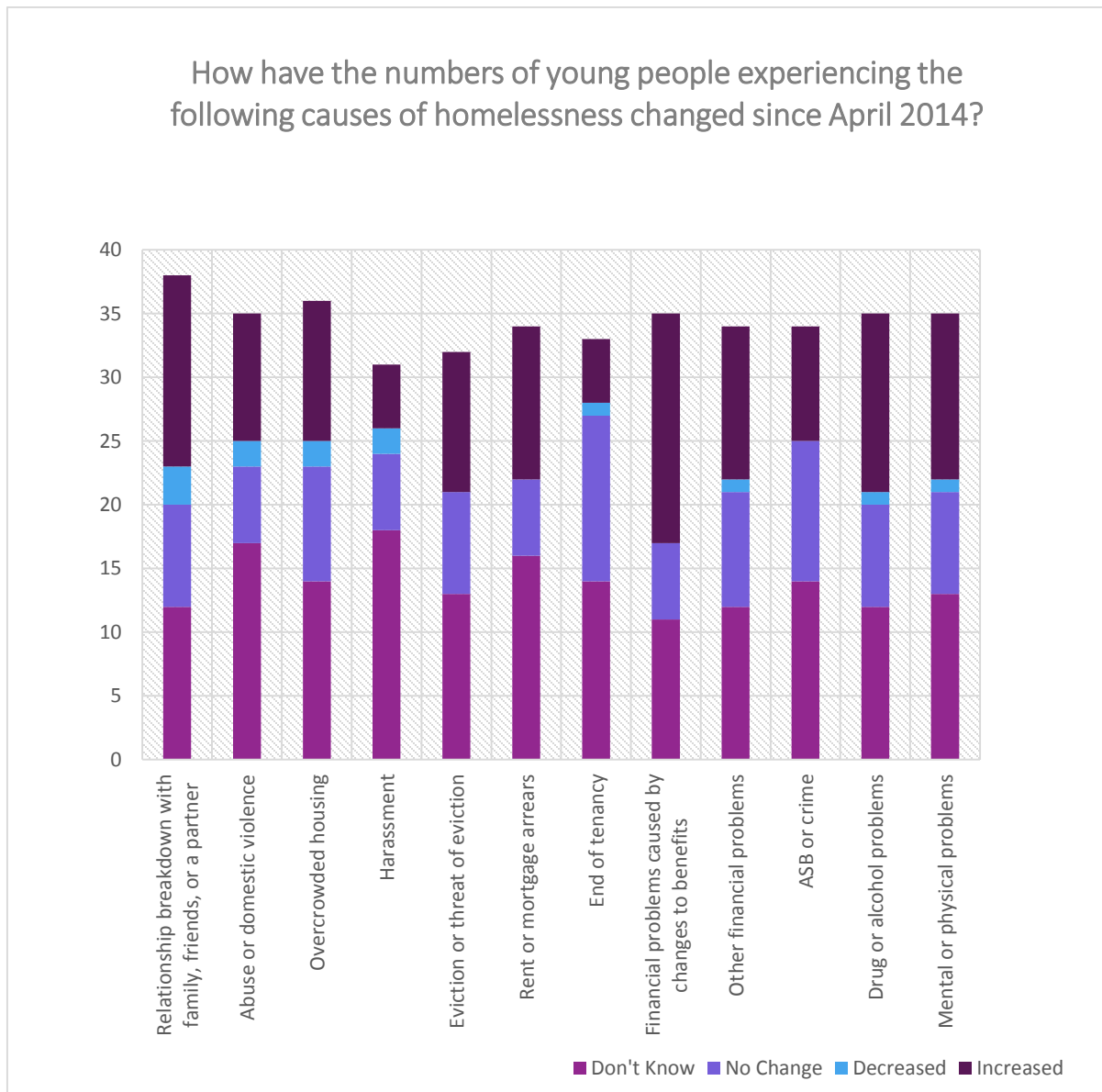
COMPLEXITY OF NEEDS

No respondent had observed that complexity of the needs of young homeless people had decreased compared to the previous year. 57% had observed that complexity had increased. When compared with previous years, this can be seen as an upward trend.

How has the complexity of the needs of young single people presenting as homeless changed since April 2014?

- Increased
- Decreased
- No Change
- Don't Know

ADEQUACY OF AND CHANGES TO MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION

Over all respondents were satisfied with the quality of mental health provision, however they found the availability of young persons' mental health services to be poor. Several respondents commented that they felt the service wasn't "joined up" with either other elements of health or with housing/homelessness. A particular weak link was seen to be the lack of any joined up working whatsoever between CAMHS and adult mental health services.

> *"We have not observed changes in waiting times. No, CAMHS and adult services do not work adequately together. There are long waiting lists. Young people do not seem to engage with CAMHS workers. Inappropriate referrals are being made to CAMHS, not enough info on what CAMHS will provide."*

"Accessing mh supports takes too long. This is both within CAMHS and also with adult mh services. The transition period from child to adult is also not really appropriate as really need a youth service that works with young people perhaps until 25th birthday or similar."
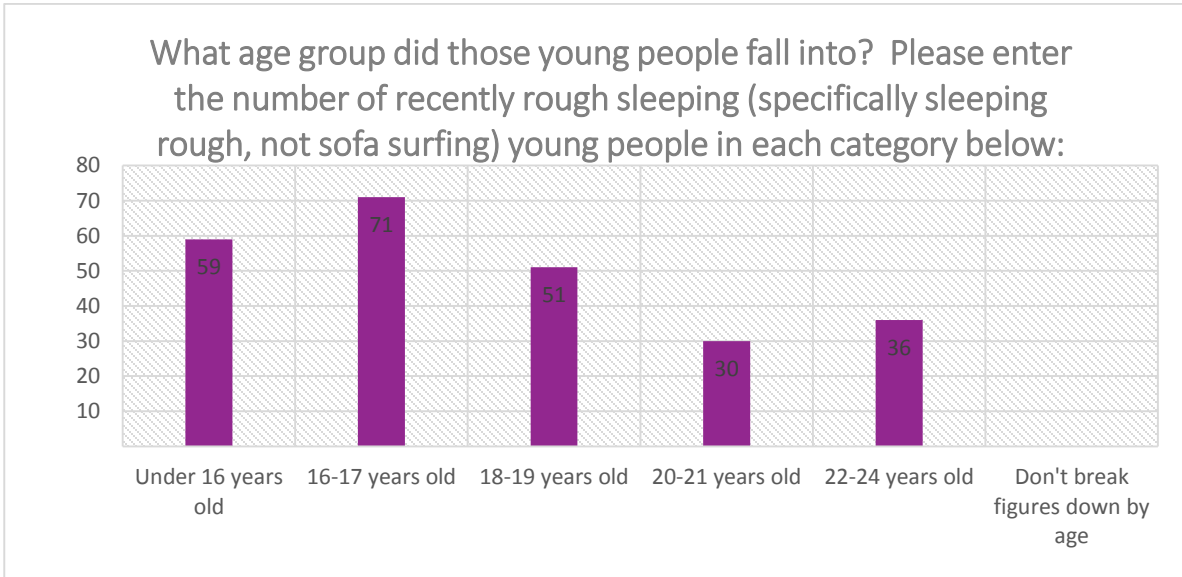
"Many of our young people are 17 years old, they are caught between youth and adult services with each service wanting the other to look after them."

Another weak point was seen to be the provision of services to the under 18s: they were either expected to still be in school and therefore be referred to CAMHS more easily or to rely on GP services alone as adult services were not prepared for them.
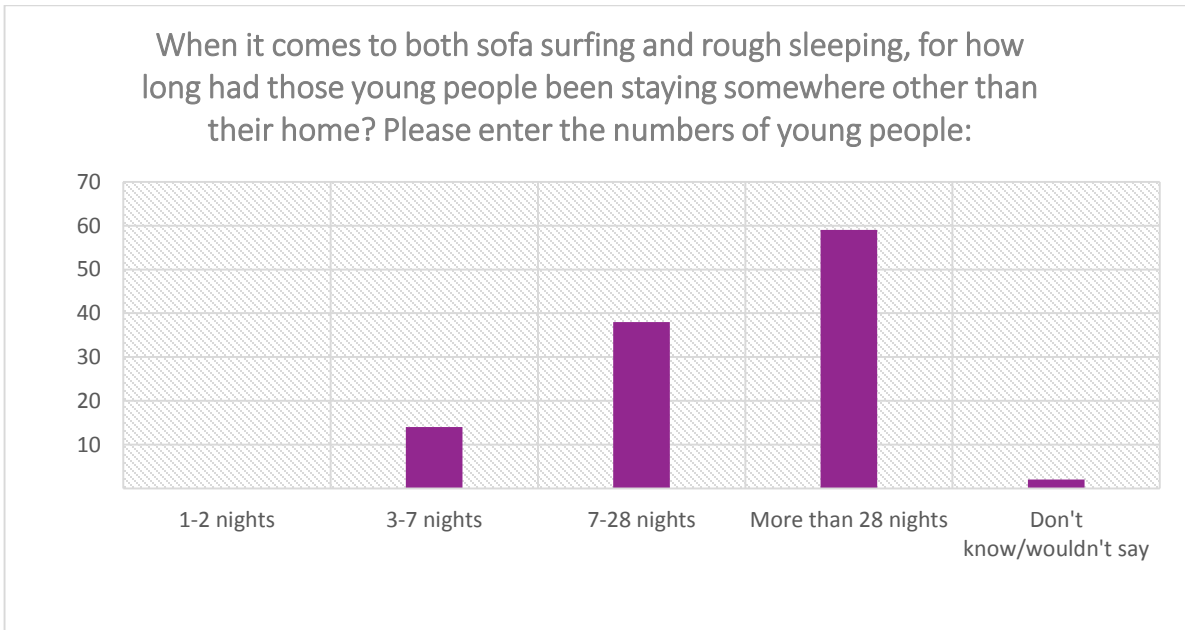
ROUGH SLEEPING AND SOFA SURFING

Three quarters of organisations surveyed did not record young people's history of rough sleeping and sofa surfing.

Where this information was recorded it showed that the majority of young people who had slept rough were under 18, with almost 60 individuals having slept rough under the age of 16. Technically, those sleeping rough under the age of 16 are classed as having run away from home. As all young people under the age of 16 are supposed to be under the care of either a parent/guardian or a local authority this is very worrying and requires further investigation. There are very few services in Scotland that work with young runaways, and none that provide refuge. As evidenced by the survey, young people under the age of 16 are already approaching providers of youth housing and homelessness support for assistance. This assistance often cannot be provided due to the service's strict remit of who it can and can't support: vulnerable under 16s are often excluded as they are the responsibility of Social Work. Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure all young people in crisis are assisted swiftly and prevented from ever sleeping rough.

What age group did those young people fall into? Please enter the number of recently rough sleeping (specifically sleeping rough, not sofa surfing) young people in each category below:

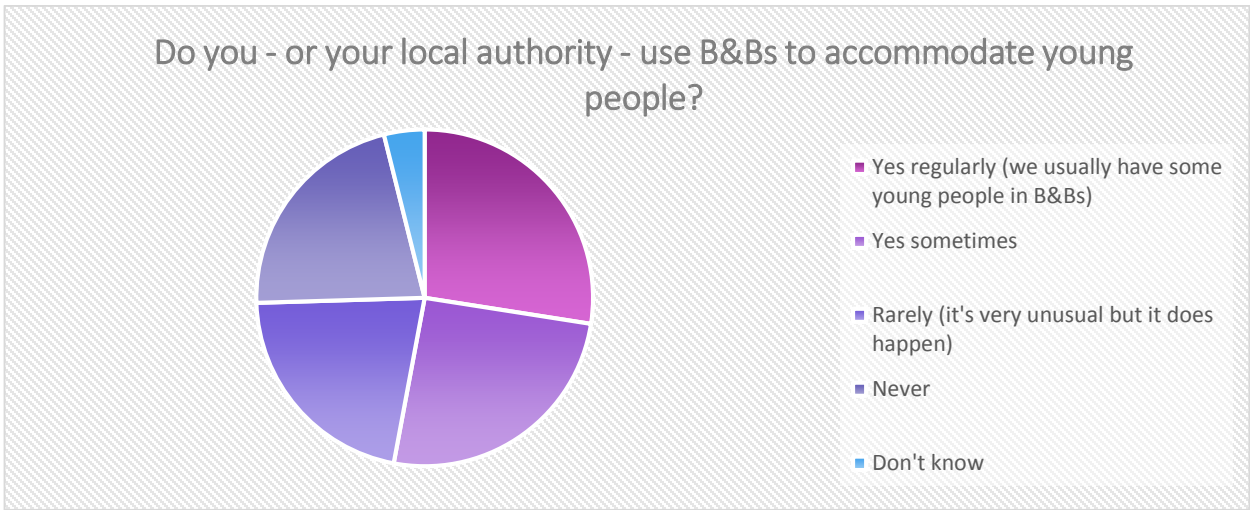| Age group	Number
Under 16 years old	59
16-17 years old	71
18-19 years old	51
20-21 years old	30
22-24 years old	36
Don't break figures down by age	

Sofa surfing was more prevalent amongst the over 18s, with 22-24 year olds sofa surfing the most. The most common duration of sofa surfing and rough sleeping was for over 28 nights. It was not asked if these nights were consecutive or aggregated or for how much longer than 28 nights young people were staying in unsuitable circumstances.

When it comes to both sofa surfing and rough sleeping, for how long had those young people been staying somewhere other than their home? Please enter the numbers of young people:

| Duration	Number
1-2 nights	
3-7 nights	14
7-28 nights	38
More than 28 nights	59
Don't know/wouldn't say	2

USE OF B&Bs, TYPES OF SUPPORTED HOUSING OPTIONS AND MOVE ON

Compared with previous years, there was a small increase in the use of B&Bs to accommodate young people, however this was matched by an increase in the number of areas that rarely or never use B&Bs.

Do you - or your local authority - use B&Bs to accommodate young people?

- ■ Yes regularly (we usually have some young people in B&Bs)
- ■ Yes sometimes
- ■ Rarely (it's very unusual but it does happen)
- ■ Never
- ■ Don't know

This can be seen to reflect the inconsistent availability of suitable alternative temporary accommodation for young people across Scotland.

Compared to previous years there was very little change in the type of longer term supported accommodation options for young people, however there was perceived to be a slight improvement in the move-on options for young people in some areas with increased availability of cashless bond schemes, social/not-for-profit lettings agencies and more shared accommodation options for young single people.
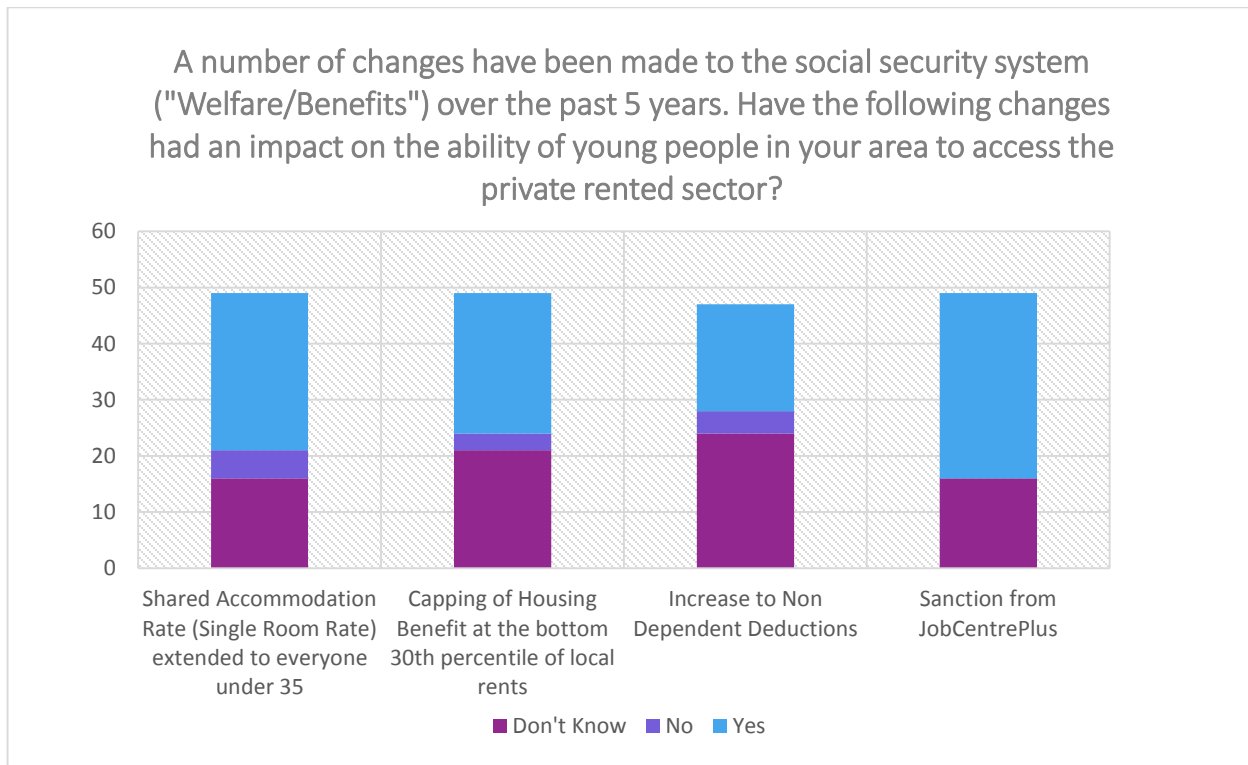

Move on...
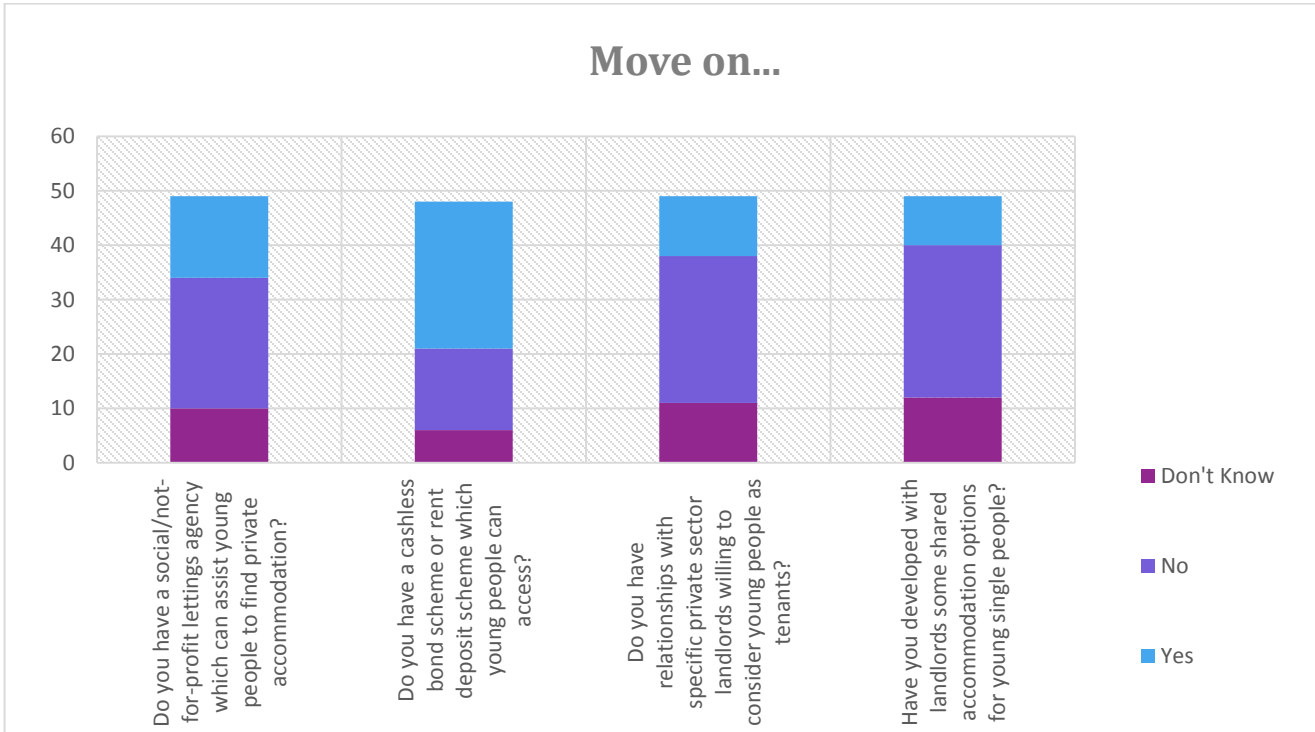
From the data gathered it is not easy to discern any pattern to the availability/lack of availability: it is not as simple as a remote rural/urban divide. Some rural areas have available housing stock, but limited support; some urban areas have limited housing stock but available capacity within support. Very few have the perfect balance between stock and support. This can adversely affect move-on from homelessness services and/or temporary accommodation.

How many of the young people you work with who have moved into their own tenancy/settled accommodation have moved into…

The single largest housing outcome for young people remained local authority housing or other RSL housing although a significant proportion had not moved on (18%). Less than 16% of young people moved into the private sector as either sole tenant or as part of shared accommodation.

IMPACT OF CHANGES TO SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM (WELFARE/ BENEFITS) ON ACCESS TO PRVATE RENTED SECTOR

The extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) to everyone under 35 was seen to be impacting young people adversely, putting a further strain on the limited housing options for single people under 25. Although a large number of people mentioned the capping of Housing Benefit at the bottom 30th percentile was affecting young people's access to the private rented sector it is also possible that for some they have confused this with the extension of the SAR. That being said, in some pressured housing areas with poor supply of single bedroom tenancies or little to no shared accommodation it could adversely affect the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate - and thus the SAR - making all but the poorest housing in the private rented sector unaffordable. Sanctions from JobCentrePlus were cited as another factor impacting the ability of young people to access the private rented sector. This was not explained, however it's likely that strict limits on income may adversely affect any affordability assessment that the young person might undergo as part of the housing options process.

A number of changes have been made to the social security system ("Welfare/Benefits") over the past 5 years. Have the following changes had an impact on the ability of young people in your area to access the private rented sector?

PREVENTION

Prevention services are increasingly seen as being at the forefront of the strategy against homelessness. Youth homelessness more than any other area has a strong focus on prevention with the term "prevention" being used to describe a very wide array of activities and services. Where provided by local authorities, prevention activities and outcomes are measured using the Scottish

Government PREVENT1[2] tool. The survey as distributed made no differentiation between types of prevention services, merely their availability.
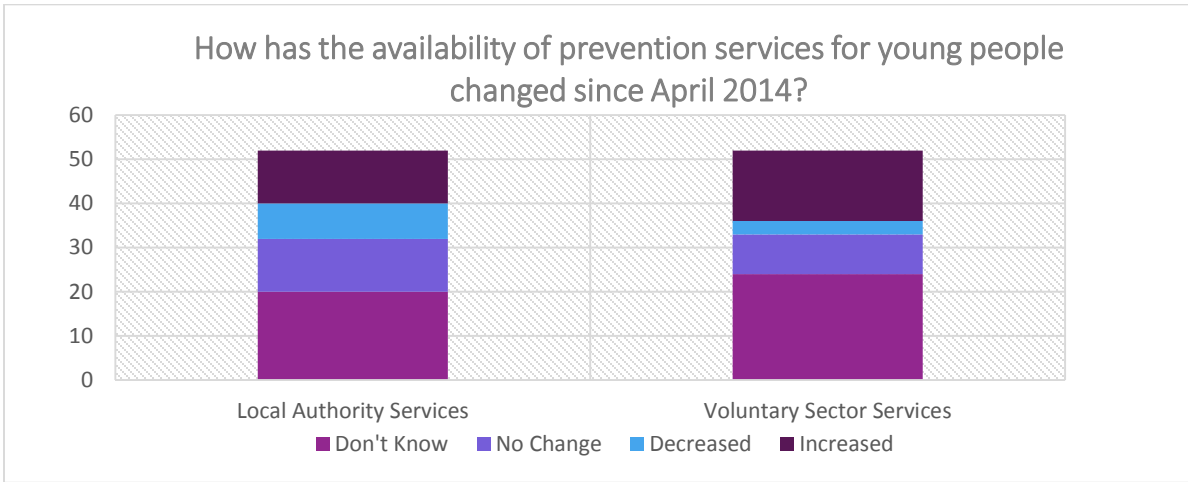
Over all, most respondents had seen a modest increase in service provision from both local authority (23%) and voluntary sector services (31%), with few respondents (6%) describing a decrease in voluntary sector services and only 15% describing a decrease in local authority provided services.

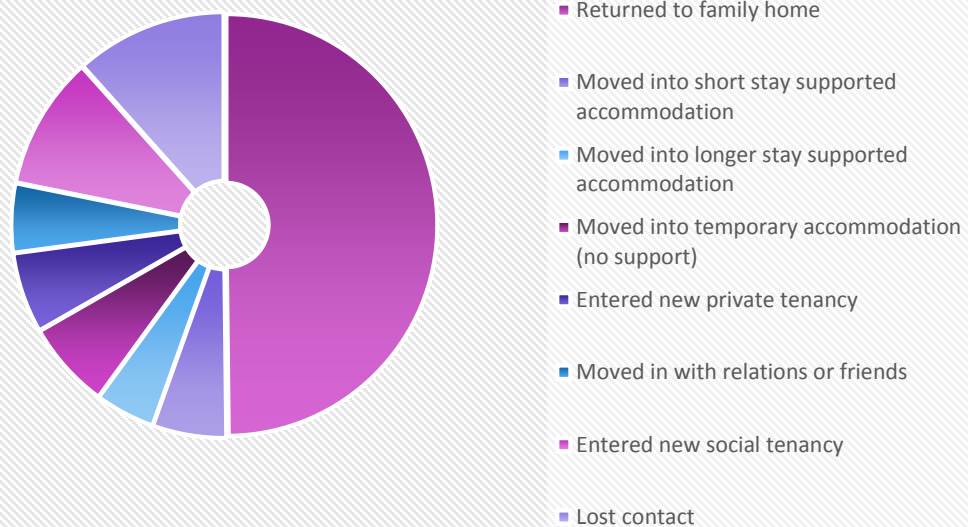> "…prevention agenda/ethos is incorporated into statutory and voluntary services"

> "…more emphasis on prevention and more availability of mediation, officer trained in mediation and in delivering prevention in schools"

> "…more workers have come on board to deal with prevention work, i.e., triage/crisis intervention prior to coming in for an interview with one of our homeless officers"

When it comes to outcomes of prevention work the single largest proportion (49%) return to their family home, however, when the different kinds of accommodation options are added together a considerable proportion are eventually housed (38%) after preventative interventions have been explored. Around 5% were "lost contacts" - of which some, but not all, can also be assumed to have returned home. This is in keeping with the overall trend in "lost contacts" for those assessed as homeless reported in the Scottish Government Annual Homelessness Statistics 2014-15.

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[2] http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/PREVENT1to31Mar15

What number of prevention cases since April 2014 resulted in the following outcomes?

Legend:
- Returned to family home
- Moved into short stay supported accommodation
- Moved into longer stay supported accommodation
- Moved into temporary accommodation (no support)
- Entered new private tenancy
- Moved in with relations or friends
- Entered new social tenancy
- Lost contact

When asked about what has worked best to prevent and relieve homelessness locally many respondents mentioned the increased availability of mediation. Mediation can come in many forms, however family conflict resolution mediation is emerging strongly as a primary tool in preventing youth homelessness. That mediation has spread and its processes understood is a positive step in acknowledging that addressing family breakdown as a major cause of homelessness is likely to make a significant impact on rates of homelessness in the longer term. However, some respondents mentioned only mediation as being available as a prevention tool. Caution should be exercised in over relying upon one method alone as a quick fix, or as a sole approach: although some family breakdowns can be reconciled by mediation, other situations require different tools, e.g., anger management, drug rehabilitation, etc. and no one single solution works effectively for all. This requires further monitoring and investigation.

 HOUSING OPTIONS

Other prevention initiatives found to be working successfully include tenancy sustainment, leaving home and housing education and, increasingly, the role of housing options for young people. One respondent noted that housing options works well as it is "often about young people identifying that they can't afford housing and return home" – this shouldn't necessarily be the intended outcome however it can't be dismissed as a consequence of the housing options process.

The housing options system is not without some criticism, however:

"I think the system would work better if it were simpler"

"This is in need of improvement due to lack of training…"

"Housing options [should] allow for more informed choices"

A common thread linking these criticisms would seem to be one of resourcing rather than principle: in order for housing options to work well it requires a well-planned system, a trained and supported staff and more time available to explore what merits and disadvantages are attached to each available option. It also relies on realistic, attractive and sustainable options being available.

When asked if "young people are best served by the Housing Options process" the range of responses given shows that housing options is not viewed equally across all regions or practice areas. Most services across service levels (e.g., frontline, management, policy) see some positives in the housing options approach. Most commonly, the value of young people being able to make informed choices is broadly welcomed. The matter of choice itself is something that is somewhat more contentious. Not all areas see the options offered to young people as constituting a real choice: where housing stock is limited, or where there is no affordable private rented sector accommodation, where there is limited supported accommodation - or none - and few options except mainstream homelessness accommodation or B&B, respondents are unsure that housing options adds any value to their work except a further level of bureaucracy. Added to which, informed choice itself depends on the knowledge and ability to discern which is the best option, not just that which is the most expedient. Not all young people receive support with the housing options process and so the "informed" part of informed decision making is moot:

> *"[few] options for young people due to limited housing stock, affordability"*
>
> *"We have very limited housing options here, either mainstream tenancies or temp tenancies/hostels. We do not have enough one-bed properties so our service users (who by and large are desperate to leave care) begin to bid for 2 bed properties and end up in arrears. Housing options are fine if you have options, but the housing stock here is poor with high turnovers… We have not yet produced a housing options protocol for care leavers. Young people who are evicted from hostels then have their housing suspension lifted, allowing them to bid so we have the ridiculous situation of young people not even being able to manage (living in) hostels, bidding and being allocated their own tenancies"*
>
> *"(It) can be very difficult for young people to select appropriate housing. Would be better for them to be supported by a housing officer in this process. Young people referred to us often require a lot of support to identify appropriate housing from housing options list"*

"…housing options often feels like a gatekeeping exercise that deters young people from accessing homelessness (services) etc. They are put off by the numbers of interviews etc. they need to go through before they can be assisted with emergency accommodation"

That care leavers are poorly served by the process of housing options in some areas could be seen to be as much about a lack of prescription from the Scottish Government in producing Care Leavers Housing Options Protocols[3] as it is about lack of availability of accommodation. As care leavers are excluded from following the homeless route when first leaving care there have been some local difficulties in interpreting the policy and the law with regard to how they should be offered a service. Although the Scottish Government's guidance sets out principles and gives some very specific practice examples, it does not offer a working practice model that can be used by all for all scenarios that might arise, nor a deadline for protocols to be in place, nor easily accessible continued support for local authorities struggling to fulfil their duties. The support provided to local authorities has primarily been from third sector organisations,[4] where the onus is on the local authority to participate and seek advice, rather than for that information to be provided for them.

There may be some criticism that one is likely to receive more negative responses in a survey comprising open questions rather than positive ones as it is most commonly the case that those who are dissatisfied are more likely to respond than those who are content. That being said, around a third of responses were positive with regard to housing options and a further quarter were neutral/ would rather pass comment when housing options was more firmly embedded in practice in their area.

Many of the positive responses to the housing options process for young people were strongly in favour of the additional opportunity the housing options interview gives them for assessment, and for the young people an opportunity for reflection;

"I believe that housing options gives young people the information that allows them to decide what is best for their own circumstances. I base this on the fact that the majority of young people who ask for a housing options appointment (do so) because they are not aware of the all the options available to them to make a home of their own"

"Yes, it provides more opportunity to access a variety of available housing rather than dependence on council housing. If done correctly housing options explores and provides greater choice to fit different circumstances and needs rather than trying to fit everyone into the 'council box'"

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[3] http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/10/6147, October 2013
[4] Homeless Action Scotland and Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum have both worked to share practice and create environments for the ongoing support required by providing online forums and events for managers and practitioners.

One very detailed response gave a very effective summary of many points raised by others;

"If a homeless application is clearly not the best option at the outset then yes the housing options process serves young people well. It will examine each person's circumstances holistically and will facilitate access to other services (money advice, mediation etc.). If they are approaching for advice and do not go onto a homeless application it could be argued that they do not come under the category of 'youth homelessness'. The final outcome of their approach may still be a homeless application. The housing options process very much includes homeless prevention activities as well as housing advice and assistance to try and support the young person moving on. The housing options process is flexible which means that time can be taken to assess the situation and assist the young person who may benefit from prevention efforts. Flexibility should also allow interviews to take place not just in council offices but also in less formal arenas such as youth cafes, schools, social work offices etc. Many cases involve young people being asked to leave the family home, often without any provision in place for where they will move on to. This can often involve some issues of tension or minor disputes or merely just that the young person is of an age where they should move out. Efforts are often focused on trying to stabilize the issues to be able to support a planned transition to other settled accommodation. Difficulties arise when young people, who may not be in employment, and/or do not want to enter shared living arrangements. This results in the young people, their parents and family seeing a homeless presentation as their only option to securing mainstream settled accommodation. This can make the housing option process ineffectual. However, in some cases young people do not want to present as homeless. The housing options process can facilitate stabilizing the current situation with in the family home. Housing options provides basic advice for many young people. Housing options staff need the ability to understand the hurdles faced by a young person to therefore be able to give tailored, specific advice while educating and honestly informing them of the realistic picture in relation to securing social housing. This can be key to them understanding that they do actually have other options open to them and assist them in making more positive life choices to assist their housing situation in the long term."

In summary, many respondents view the housing options process positively: when applied appropriately, it is not a replacement for a homelessness application or a hurdle to be overcome; housing options can divert young people from the "homeless route" without "gatekeeping"; housing options can assist with tenancy sustainment as it assists the young person to recognise what option they need, want and can afford; housing options can allow families and young people a moment to reflect on what really is the best for the young person and to plan the most appropriate way to move on; a homelessness application is not precluded from a housing options interview and should not be seen as a diversion from a young person being able to exercise their rights.

Where there are few realistic, desirable housing options, the housing options process can deter young people from progressing with a homelessness application; there are still some issues of conflict in developing common understanding and best practice between housing and social work/throughcare; the support required to assist a young person through the housing options process might not be available when required due to the additional work required; not all housing options officers are trained in working with young people and understanding their specific needs; there is still a possibility that in some areas the housing options process is nonetheless used as a means of gatekeeping or rationing social housing.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The survey asked, "In your experience, on average how long do young people stay in temporary accommodation? Do you think this has changed over the past 5 years? What do you think accounts for this?" A wide variety of responses show that the situation across Scotland is not uniform.

The briefest period spent in temporary accommodation was registered at 6 weeks, the longest period, around 24 months. The most common answer given was between 6 months to a year. There is a huge discrepancy between time spent in temporary accommodation across Scotland and for young people in particular this unsettled accommodation can be a huge barrier in being able to make progress in their lives. Temporary accommodation is rarely cheap and in some places is not plentiful. Young people can become trapped financially and deterred from taking up work or education and training due to the follow on costs if they are in temporary accommodation and lose their entitlement to passported benefits.

Where the duration of stay in temporary accommodation was less than six months, a common factor contributing to this relatively brief stay seems to be "*greater cooperation with Registered Social Landlords", "the housing options approach" and, "an increase in the number of support options available to young people".* Additionally, availability of one bedroomed properties and new construction of RSL properties locally was also a factor. This was not widespread however, with only 6 out of 70 responses finding that the time spent in temporary accommodation had decreased.

Most respondents were of the view that the duration spent in temporary accommodation had increased over the past five years. Where this was seen to be the case it was almost as though a total inversion of the reasons for shorter duration stays in temporary accommodation were true: *"lack of available one bed accommodation", "loss of young person specific support", "inappropriate accommodation", "changes to welfare… and cuts in benefits" and "total lack of move-on accommodation".* One of the reasons for a lack of appropriate accommodation was touched upon in one response as *"the pressure on permanent lets has increased waiting time for all groups".* This could

be seen as a reference to the raising of the age limit for receiving the Shared Accommodation Rate to under 35, from under 25, increasing the pool of people seeking affordable one bedroom local authority and RSL housing. With increasing numbers of people effectively competing for the same housing a bottleneck is created, restricting the flow of people on to their preferred and appropriate housing option. More generally, financial pressures- restricting and reducing benefits, postponing or cancelling building programmes, reducing staffing or mainstreaming specialisms, limiting or removing support - contribute significantly to the overall impasse in temporary accommodation, with additional delays coming as a consequence of further budgetary strictures down the line.

Very few respondents saw the young people themselves as in any way contributing to their own long stays in temporary accommodation although a couple of responses seemed to suggest that some young people might not be deemed appropriate for taking on their own tenancy due to not being "housing ready",

> *"If the young person is unprepared for the responsibility of managing a tenancy [it might be] some time before they are activated for permanent accommodation", " [decision makers] will only authorise a young person's homeless application when they are satisfied the young person is ready to sustain their own tenancy."*

This is gatekeeping, albeit with benevolent intentions, and is something that needs to be monitored and acted upon should it be seen to be becoming a more prevalent practice. Currently we cannot say with any certainty that a "housing ready" requirement is common when working with young people. Additionally there is some confusion over terms used to describe tenancy sustainment and tenancy preparation activities and how they can be misinterpreted as an artificial barrier to acquiring settled accommodation. This will require further exploration if we are to be satisfied that young people are not hindered in being able to exercise their rights to settled accommodation.

ATTITUDES

Poverty and Housing Stock

It is a common criticism from young people that workers' attitudes towards them are often at odds with how they feel they should be treated. Even within housing departments there is a recognition that working with young people can require a different set of knowledge and skills than those needed for working with adults, and where those skills or knowledge are absent both worker and young person can find themselves stressed and in conflict with others. In order to explore some of the attitudes towards young people, and to determine a sense of how respondents viewed some of the issues surrounding the current housing environment, two questions related to solely to attitudes and ideas,

not practice, were included in the survey question schedule: "Which do you think is the biggest obstacle to housing young people: poverty or lack of available housing stock?" and "Do you believe young people contribute to their own continuing housing crisis? If so, in what ways and how can this be countered?"

These questions were not intended to "catch anybody out" – there is clearly no one right way to work with young people, nor one correct attitude to have – more, they were intended to explore how much people working with young people had considered factors beyond their day to day work that might influence them, and to what extent it is a consideration when they are fulfilling their duties towards young people.

With regard to the first question, "Which do you think is the biggest obstacle to housing young people: poverty or lack of available housing stock?" it is interesting to note that many respondents questioned the central premise and rejected the simple binary of only those two options being relevant. Some respondents added caveats to their responses *("If I had to choose from only these options…")*. Other respondents, rather than choosing either/or, placed them within a hierarchy. Very few took the question at face value.

In keeping with Maslow's hammer[5], it is perhaps unsurprising that, for people working within housing, lack of housing stock is seen as the primary obstacle to housing young people.

> *"Lack of social housing is clearly a key factor with demand far outweighing supply"*

> *"The biggest obstacle facing all homeless people is the lack of suitable move on accommodation…"*

> *"Lack of housing stock makes waiting times much greater (leaving people in a transient state as they can never settle waiting on being told to move) Also housing in low turnover areas (more sought after) rarely becomes available and this can hinder someone who is actively trying to turn their life around"*

> *"Lack of available housing stock due to being sold off in RTB [Right to Buy] with little or no new build one bedroom as not cost effective"*

This sentiment, more or less, featured in 55 of the 72 responses received. The lack of suitable accommodation and the bottleneck effect it has on temporary and supported accommodation is one that has been mentioned earlier in this report. Although this is not a new problem it has been worsened by the effects of changes to the benefits system, the legacy of Right to Buy and its knock-on

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[5] Maslow's Hammer: "if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail" (Abraham Maslow, The Psychology of Science, 1966)

effect of prohibiting the reinvestment of the proceeds of sale from properties bought through RTB in building new social housing, along with the continuing long term effects of the financial crash of 2008 making the investment in the building of social houses either unaffordable or risky. All of these factors taken together could be seen to lead to a pessimistic outcome for young people whose best option is to present as homeless.

Of those who saw poverty as the biggest obstacle to housing young people views were more divided, with some seeing poverty as something that could not be overcome without access to education and training,

> *"…poverty can be overcome by education and support and raising young people's aspirations"*

others who viewed poverty as something that young people had brought upon themselves through what they saw as poor life choices,

> *"…when young people spend their benefits on branded clothing and don't buy food or pay their service charge."*

and others who saw poverty as somehow intractable,

> *"Young people do not have opportunity or hope for their future. Lack of viable employment opportunities and lack of money to comfortable furnish and make tenancies into proper homes. Poor quality of housing offered to young people means that tenancies often break down and young people return to homeless accommodation."*

Another viewpoint saw problems with the system within which young people are made to operate,

> *'Often the minefield is if they switch between benefits/education and employment, they can get themselves into financial difficulties, particularly with rent and council tax."*

Each of these points is valid, but unlike the responses regarding lack of housing there is no one clear idea linking all responses together: the concept of poverty seems to require thinking from a more ideological viewpoint in order to make sense of the world. The idea of poverty and its causes is more complex than that of housing availability. Over all, people who work in housing are not only aware of but also reflective upon the causes of and solutions to young people's housing crisis.

Young People and Housing Crisis

A more contentious question within the survey asked, "Do you believe some young people contribute to their own continuing housing crisis? If so, in what ways can this be countered?" Again, the question was not a trap with a right or wrong answer but a means of gauging if there was some sort of consensus common to all working within youth housing and homelessness.

Although not quite a consensus, 55 out of 72 respondents believed that young people were either contributors or part-contributors to their own housing crisis. Only 6 respondents did not view young people as being in any way responsible for their housing crisis. Two contributors remarked that this was, "An interesting question…!"

Of those who did not view young people as responsible or mainly responsible for their housing crisis the predominant view was that the young people they had worked with were often victims of circumstance.

> " In my experience …a lot of the young ' rough sleepers' said they left home because of the breakdown of family, e.g., new stepfather, their belligerence and angst at their lives and their 'relevant [sic] poverty' they find themselves in, sometimes caused by their own parents' lack of parenting skills and drug and alcohol abuse. They are being set up to fail"

> "I know of care leavers who have been allocated tenancies and just have not managed these, mostly because they are targeted by the community and allow people into their tenancies who do not treat them with respect. We would include these within our child sexual exploitation population. The young people are not ready emotionally to live on their own without support and they are also experiencing trauma from earlier life experiences which affect their ability to cope. They are also experiencing severe poverty. We need to recognise that they will not follow a linear path on the way to secure housing and need to allow them to move between resources without feeling like they have failed."

Other responses very much placed the onus of responsibility on the young person,

> "Sometimes I feel young people contribute to their own housing crisis as young people think it's 'the grass is greener' having their own property appeals to them where they can do what they want - no sense of responsibility. Once they do come homeless a lot of customers lose contact with the service as it wasn't what they thought it was going to be."

> "Yes as some young people just don't care or can't be bothered"

Most responses were less polarised, recognising that although young people might contribute to their housing crisis they were not necessarily its cause.

> "I feel it's a societal problem not just the individual. Housing provides young people with just enough support of they are quite able and functioning well to get them into a new tenancy and sustain it for a 6-week period. After that, they are either considered to be able to manage independently, or they require further housing support from a support service. Young people can present challenges to services that are 'generic' which can result in their specific needs not being met, or the right approach not being fostered in enough time to manage/avoid crisis. Young

people don't do what we expect from them sometimes, and if they are in their home environment they could have some protection from messing things up by simply not doing things when they should. But when fending for themselves in this big world, it all generally comes back to bite them and the spiral continues."

"Yes of course - BUT not intentionally. Effective education about rights and responsibilities helps, but sometimes YPs need a first "failure" as a real learning experience. This is something previous generations have been allowed - but more draconian welfare legislation no longer provides for this."

The need for better education in schools about independent living/leaving home and housing to help young people understand the realities of setting up in their own home was mentioned by several respondents as a means of diverting some of the "most preventable" from seeking to apply as homeless. The increasing workload of shrinking support teams was also considered a factor in some young people's housing crisis, with young people either not accessing support quickly enough or not receiving the more intensive support at a time that they need it. Lack of being properly parented - including from corporate parents - was also seen as contributing to young people's housing crisis, as well as a lack of positive role models and social networks. Many respondents struggled with young people's challenging behaviour. They observed that it contributed to housing crisis by creating an obstacle to supporting the young person, but at the same time the challenging behaviour was in itself the issue that needed dealt with in order to improve tenancy sustainment over all. Some felt they were insufficiently trained to deal with the increasingly complex emotional problems that often come with increasingly complex needs.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE PROPOSALS

The previous Youth Homelessness in Scotland reports included questions concerning new developments in legislation and policy. This year's question relates to the Westminster Government's proposals for the new Youth Allowance, "Proposals for the Youth Allowance are to be put to the Westminster Parliament later this session. Part of these plans include limiting access to financial support for housing, with the exception of care leavers, young parents and some vulnerable people (yet to be defined) and adding work-related activity from Day 1 of claim. Do you broadly agree or disagree with these proposals and how do you think it will affect your work/affect young people?" This is a complex proposal and a complex question. The overwhelming majority of respondents had a very simple answer: they disagreed with the proposal in its entirety.

"Young people are among the most vulnerable in society. These measures effectively represent a worsening of an already difficult situation and could reasonably be expected to result in homelessness"

"I think any proposals which limits financial or other support to young people is a regressive and retrograde step. This is an ideological move by the Government which will cause significant hardship for many, limiting choice and scope."

"The current government are hitting vulnerable people hard and young vulnerable people have been hit particularly hard. My understanding of this allowance is that it will be £57.35 for 30 hours work equalling £1.91 per hour, which I think is abhorrent. If we have work for the young people to do why don't we employ them and pay them the rate for the job?"

Even where most people had a degree of agreement with the proposals, there was a sense of concern as to how the proposals would be applied,

"I broadly agree with reducing reliance on benefits, but there needs to be a flexibility in the definition of 'vulnerable' and recognition of the limitations of employment and housing choices in some areas'

"…great so long as there are work options available and also that the young person is fit/able to work – I see many more with mental health concerns and this may be a major problem for them – may not be diagnosed but struggling to cope"

Where answered, respondents saw the proposals as adding to their workload, either through additional contact with the DWP, needing to provide additional support to stressed young people or through an increased case load of young people forced into homelessness and rough sleeping.

HOUSING NEEDS

When asked, "How do you see young people's housing needs changing in the next 5 years" no responses were entirely optimistic. At best two respondents could refer to local changes, such as building new homes or national changes to policy regarding care leavers right to assistance until the age of 25, but in general the mood gathered from the responses was gloomy.

"More crisis intervention for support agencies, more homeless applications, limited access to affordable housing"

"I see young people on the poverty line and more rough sleepers"

"Austerity and poverty will continue to increase the number of young people presenting as homeless. The young people that are presenting will have an increasingly complex variety of needs and issues they present with. An increase in agencies that are specialist in supporting and engaging with young people is required to safeguard these young people and encourage them to contribute positively to their communities and feel like valued citizens"

"I believe there will be greater failed tenancies and greater relationship breakdown presentations. We could be creating a bigger problem in terms of assisting them later in life when the support becomes available as there will have been far longer time for damage to have been done that will take a long time to undo with support. It will be harder to reach the disaffected youth, they already feel not cared about and the government seems to be backing this up by their new proposals."

"I do not enjoy being a prophet of doom, but I can see an increase in rough sleeping. Having worked for many years with one of the most liberal national homelessness mitigation policies in the world it's heart breaking that all the positive work in Scotland is at real risk because of welfare reform."

Aside from the current sense of hopelessness these answers seem to suggest, it could also point to a crisis of morale and recruitment/retention in the future: a demotivated workforce that sees no hope is one that is less likely to continue in the same line of employment. As a profession the additional stresses and constraints can make it seem a less attractive career option. Staff that feel unappreciated or undermined are at risk of impaired performance. Although, from the responses to this survey at least, there would seem to be a strong feeling -a passion, even – for social justice and a commitment to the advancement of young people who are experiencing housing crisis, this is less likely to be sustainable should further negative impacts to young people's housing occur.

SUPPORTING AND PREVENTING HOUSING CRISIS

If respondents were pessimistic in their predictions for the next five years, they were more positive when it came to identifying good practice locally when asked, "What do you consider to the most effective in supporting or preventing young people in housing crisis? Is this something that is available in your area?"

"I think each area needs to be treated uniquely, if possible. Certain schemes that work in a city or town just do not work in most rural or island areas. My project aims to advise young people on their housing options and lobby for better policy. We interact with them online and through social media and it is very effective. We are starting to go into schools and speak to the future generations about housing. I think it is important to make young people aware of these issues and for them to be involved in planning their future."

"A good mix of provision, we use the voluntary sector to deliver a range of support to young people including accommodation owned and managed by them, they can do this and provide a much wider range of support in house where the council would need to commission this separately."

"Our Housing Association works in partnership with other agencies to provide support for young people, such as Keys to Learn and Gen R 8. We also have a Regeneration Department that works with and provides a lot of services for our young people, such as School of Hard Knocks... Young people need a lot of guidance in how to live their lives with consideration for others in their environment. They also need a lot of advice in relation to budgeting and housekeeping and some of the agencies we work with provide this type of guidance."

Many people cited mediation as having made an impact in their area; others were seeing the benefits of improved partnership working between statutory agencies and third sector service providers. Some believed that retaining specialist youth provision - either through a specialist Youth Housing Options Team or a youth housing advice service with accessible hours and a fixed location – was the thing that was most effective for the young people they worked with. Several responses mentioned that having trained professionals who were consistent in maintaining high quality service levels as being of greatest benefit to young people in their area. Leaving home and housing education was also valued, both in schools and in informal education environments, with the biggest impact being seen to come from the earliest interventions, although there were some who questioned the efficacy of the programmes delivered by schools. For many of the respondents this question was more of a wish list than a reflection of their current situation, nonetheless most could identify positive practice that benefited young people in their area.

CONCLUSIONS

- It is perceived that young people who approach youth housing and homelessness services are doing so with increasingly complex needs.

- Young people who have been looked after, people with mental or physical ill health, people who identify as LGBTQI or who are from BME backgrounds are disproportionately represented amongst the youth homeless population.

- Organisations inconsistently record data relating to minority groups or other groups likely to face prejudice. This may mean they are under reported.

- The provision of mental health support for young people is inadequate and inconsistent with little joined-up working between CAMHS and adult services.

- Family breakdown continues to be the single largest cause of youth homelessness.

- The introduction of the PREVENT1 tool has helped local authorities codify what constitutes prevention.

- The most common outcome of a prevention intervention for young people is to return to the family home.

- Mediation is the most common prevention intervention for young people.

- The housing options process is perceived as complex and is inconsistent across Scotland

- Some areas in Scotland have few realistic housing options for young people

- Care Leavers Housing Options Protocols are either still not fully developed or are not entirely joined up with other areas of legislation and practice.

- The duration young people stay in temporary accommodation has increased over the past 5 years.

- The lack of housing stock is seen by workers as a bigger issue than poverty.

- Workers sometimes view young people as contributing to their own housing crisis, but are not seen as entirely at fault.

- Leaving Home and Housing Education within schools is valued as a means of preparing young people for independent living but is not taught in all areas of Scotland.

- Teams working within youth housing and homelessness are experiencing increased workloads and a shrinking workforce: this affects morale.

- Workers predict the housing needs of young people will worsen in the next 5 years.

- Workers recognise that there is a lot of good practice taking place across Scotland within youth homelessness and that a wide array of skills is being used to assist young people out of housing crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Create and implement a means of recording minority groups' engagement with advice and support to ensure the needs of service users are developed appropriately and sensitively.

2.   Develop and support specific prevention interventions targeted at discrete groups within the youth homeless population, e.g., specific support for LGBTQI young people.

3.   Improve the provision of joined-up support for young people experiencing poor mental health.

4.   Homelessness prevention services to more closely with health, including community mental health and CAMHS, in order to identify who might need targeted homelessness prevention support.

5.   Homelessness prevention services to build stronger links with community and family services.

6.   Continue to support mediation as a tool in prevention of homelessness.

7.   Develop further homelessness prevention tools to ensure the widest variety of approaches is used across Scotland.

8.   Publish robust Housing Options Guidance and training for all local authorities as quickly as possible.

9.   Continue to develop practical support for the development and implementation of Care Leavers Housing Options Protocols.

10.   Ensure the time young people spend in temporary accommodation is as brief as possible in order to allow them to best take advantage of education, training and employment possibilities

11.   Invest in creating more local authority and RSL affordable accommodation across Scotland.

12.   Continue to support and develop leaving home and housing education in schools across Scotland.

13.   Create a means of rewarding and celebrating good practice in youth homelessness prevention.

Appendix 1

The question schedule that was emailed to the Homeless Action Scotland distribution list.

homeless action scotland

Firstly, we would like to thank you for participating in this survey. The results will be published in the form of a report and used as evidence throughout the year. It is designed to take an overview of youth homelessness in Scotland.

In order to ensure as many people as possible can participate, it would be greatly helpful if you could forward this survey to any partner organisations, frontline workers, etc as possible. No individuals will be identified from the information given unless consent is expressly given.

There are 12 pages in the survey (around 30 questions). We anticipate that it may take well over 45 minutes to complete and we would appreciate as much detail as possible.
We are aware that not everyone has access to the same data/works with the same client group, so questions can be skipped if you have nothing to add.
Equally, if you have more information than can be captured in a questionnaire, e.g., case studies or other data/examples, please contact Nick Harleigh-Bell (nick@homelessactionscotland.org.uk).

If browsing through the survey to prepare responses DO NOT PRESS SUBMIT, but close the window or use your back button to exit.

Although not advisable, if you cannot complete the survey in one go, you should be able return to it and complete it later before submission. Once submitted however it cannot be revised. **Please complete your responses by July 22nd.**

If you are having difficulties with the survey logging you out/timing out or would prefer a writable pdf of the survey please contact admin@homelessactionscotland.org.uk to be emailed a copy

We anticipate repeating this survey annually to discern any changes in youth homelessness from year to year.

This year's report will be completed and published by the end of September.

Once more, thank you for participating.

About you and your service

These questions are designed to find out about who is responding to the survey, what areas geographically and in terms of service provided, and what kind of services are represented.

1. Do you work for...

○ Local Authority

○ Voluntary Organisation

○ Housing Association

○ Health

Please specify which department or "other" organisation you work for,

2. Please give a short description of the kind of service you provide.

Please also provide your name and contact details-including name of organisation. (No organisation/individual will be identified in the written findings.)

Service Description

Contact Details

3. What is your job role? (You may give more than one answer)

☐ Frontline

☐ Strategic

☐ Policy

☐ Team Leader

☐ Manager

☐ Senior Manager

☐ Volunteer

Other (please specify)

4. Where is your service based?
(If you work in several areas, please tick all that apply)

☐ Aberdeen City

☐ Aberdeenshire

☐ Angus

☐ Argyll and Bute

☐ Clackmannanshire

☐ Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

☐ Dumfries and Galloway

☐ Dundee City

☐ East Ayrshire

☐ East Dunbartonshire

☐ East Lothian

☐ East Renfrewshire

☐ Edinburgh City

☐ Falkirk

☐ Fife

☐ Glasgow City

☐ Highland

☐ Inverclyde

☐ Midlothian

☐ Moray

☐ North Ayrshire

☐ North Lanarkshire

☐ Orkney

☐ Perth and Kinross

☐ Renfrewshire

☐ Scottish Borders

☐ Shetland

☐ South Ayrshire

☐ South Lanarkshire

☐ Stirling

☐ West Dunbartonshire

☐ West Lothian

☐ Nationally - within Scotland

☐ UK-wide

Attitudes, thoughts and ideas

This section of the survey is aimed at finding out what you think about current policy and practice and how you think things could/should change.

5. Do you think that young people are best served by the Housing Options process? Can you give examples of the evidence you base this on?

6. In your experience, on average how long do young people stay in temporary accommodation? Do you think this has changed over the past 5 years? What do you think accounts for this?

7. Which do you think is the biggest obstacle to housing young people: poverty or lack of available housing stock? What makes you think this?

8. Do you believe some young people contribute to their own continuing housing crisis? If so, in what ways and how can this be countered?

9. Proposals for the Youth Allowance are to be put to the Westminster Parliament later this session. Part of these plans include limiting access to financial support for housing, with the exception of care leavers, young parents and some vulnerable people (yet to be defined) and adding work-related activity from Day 1 of claim.

Do you broadly agree or disagree with these proposals and how do you think it will affect your work/affect young people?

10. How do you see young people's housing needs changing in the next 5 years?

11. What do you consider to be most effective in supporting or preventing young people in housing crisis? Is this something that is available in your area?

Rough sleeping and sofa surfing

12. Do you monitor young people's rough sleeping and sofa surfing

○ Yes

○ No

13. What age group did those young people fall into?
Please enter the number of recently rough sleeping (specifically sleeping rough, not sofa surfing) young people in each category below:

Under 16 years old

16-17 years old 18-

19 years old 20-21

years old 22-24

years old

Don't break figures
down by age

Sofa Surfing etc

14. What age group did those young people fall into?
Please enter the number of recently sofa-surfing young people in each category below:

Under 16 years old

16-17 years old 18-

19 years old 20-21

years old 22-24

years old

Don't break figures
down by age

15. When it comes to both sofa surfing and rough sleeping, for how long had those young people been staying somewhere other than their home? Please enter the numbers of young people:

1-2 nights

3-7 nights

7-28 nights

More than 28 nights

Don't know/wouldn't say

Causes of Homelessness & Young People's Needs

16. What number of young single people under 25 presenting to your service experienced the following causes of homelessness since April 2014?

Many young people will have experienced multiple causes, please count each and not solely the primary cause

Relationship
breakdown with family,
friends, or a partner

Abuse or
domestic violence

Overcrowded housing

Harassment

Eviction or threat
of eviction

Rent or mortgage arrears

End of tenancy

Financial problems caused
by benefits reduction

ASB or crime

Drug or alcohol problems

Mental or physical health
problems

17. How have the numbers of young people experiencing the following causes of homelessness changed since April 2014?

	Increased	Decreased	No Change	Don't Know
Relationship breakdown with family, friends, or a partner	○	○	○	○
Abuse or domestic violence	○	○	○	○
Overcrowded housing	○	○	○	○
Harassment	○	○	○	○
Eviction or threat of eviction	○	○	○	○
Rent or mortgage arrears	○	○	○	○
End of tenancy	○	○	○	○
Financial problems caused by changes to benefits	○	○	○	○
Other financial problems	○	○	○	○
ASB or crime	○	○	○	○
Drug or alcohol problems	○	○	○	○
Mental or physical problems	○	○	○	○

18. How has the complexity of the needs of young single people presenting as homeless changed since April 2014?

○ Increased

○ Decreased

○ No Change

○ Don't Know

Please provide details

19. Specifically, where young people present to your service with diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issues:

Do you find there are adequate services to refer them to?

Have you observed any changes in mental health service provision/waiting times for young people in the past year?

Do CAMHS and adult mental health services work adequately

together? Please give examples where possible.

Profile of Service Users

20. How many young people (under 25) in total have approached your service since April 2014?

Numbers of Young People

Don't know

21. Of these;

How many young people approaching your service were...

LGBTQI

Black or Minority Ethnic

Mentally or Physically Disabled

Formerly Looked After (including fostered, kinship care, etc)

Formerly Young Carers

Diagnosed Mental Illness

Undiagnosed Mental Illness

Young Parents

Prevention

22. Prevention initiatives in your area...

	Yes	No	Don't know
Is education work in schools or other youth provision currently delivered in your area?	○	○	○
Do Children's Services and Housing work together to target young people under 16 and their families where there are clear trigger factors indicating homelessness is a possibility aged 16/17?	○	○	○
Do you have access to a mediation service to support your prevention work?	○	○	○
Do you have access to a CAMHS team to support young people?	○	○	○
Do you have a dedicated Throughcare/Aftercare team?	○	○	○
Are you working in partnership with any local Police/Criminal Justice initiatives?	○	○	○

Please provide details

23. How has the availability of prevention services for young people changed since April 2014?

	Increased	Decreased	No Change	Don't Know
Local Authority Services	○	○	○	○
Voluntary Sector Services	○	○	○	○

Please explain your answer

24. What number of prevention cases since April 2014 resulted in the following outcomes?

Returned to family home

Moved into short stay
supported accommodation

Moved into longer stay

supported accommodation

Moved into temporary accommodation (no support)

Entered new
private
tenancy

Moved in with
relations or
friends

Entered
new social
tenancy

Lost contact

25. What has worked best to prevent and relieve youth homelessness in
your area since April 2014? What areas are most in need of improvement?

Accommodation

26. Do you - or your local authority - use B&Bs to accommodate young people?

- ○ Yes regularly (we usually have some young people in B&Bs)
- ○ Yes sometimes
- ○ Rarely (it's very unusual but it does happen)
- ○ Never
- ○ Don't know

Any further comments

27. What suitable emergency accommodation can young people access in your area?

☐ Crash pad beds

☐ Specialist hostel accommodation

☐ Assessment centre/short stay supported accommodation

☐ Other short stay accommodation

Other (please specify)

28. Has the availability of these longer term supported housing options changed since April 2014?

	Increased	Decreased	No Change	Don't Know
Hostels/foyers	○	○	○	○
Supported lodgings	○	○	○	○
Shared housing with floating support	○	○	○	○
Self-contained units with low or no support	○	○	○	○
Sharing housing for those in education, training or employment	○	○	○	○

29. Move on...

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you have a social/not-for-profit lettings agency which can assist young people to find private accommodation?	○	○	○
Do you have a cashless bond scheme or rent deposit scheme which young people can access?	○	○	○
Do you have relationships with specific private sector landlords willing to consider young people as tenants?	○	○	○
Have you developed with landlords some shared accommodation options for young single people?			

Other (please specify)

30. How many of the young people you work with who have moved into their own tenancy/settled accommodation have moved into...

Housing Association

Council Housing

Other Social Housing (e.g. Cooperative housing)

Private Housing (own tenancy)

Private Housing (shared accommodation)

Have not moved on

Welfare Reform

31. A number of changes have been made to the social security system ("Welfare Benefits") over the past 5 years.
Have the following changes had an impact on the ability of young people in your area to access the private rented sector?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Shared Accommodation Rate (Single Room Rate) extended to everyone under 35	○	○	○
Capping of Housing Benefit at the bottom 30th percentile of local rents	○	○	○
Increase to Non Dependent Deductions	○	○	○
Sanction from JobCentrePlus	○	○	○

If Yes, please provide details

32. Any other comments/information you would like to share

0131 337 8243   www.homelessactionscotland.org.uk

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