

Improving the system of services for vulnerable young people

Research into an approach to the housing, social care and support needs of young homeless people and young people leaving care in Torfaen

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Section 1

Introduction and context

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The membership of Torfaen's Supporting People Planning Group (SPPG) includes representation from Housing, Youth Offending and Social Care. The SPPG recognises the diverse housing support needs of vulnerable young people (YP) and the complexities of ensuring Social Care, Housing and Youth Offending Team (YOT) services meet those needs in the most effective way. Therefore, they commissioned Shelter Cymru and Cardiff University to investigate the provision and need for housing and related support services through the eyes of the service users and providers in Torfaen.
- 1.1.2 The research team employed an approach that combined the views of local vulnerable YP with the views of the professionals working with them. This method incorporated in-depth interviews with vulnerable YP as well as self-completion questionnaires and in-depth interviews with service providers and local authority staff. The findings were triangulated to create a well-informed research study. The purpose of the research is to provide a series of recommendations that will inform an improved 'system of services' for vulnerable YP in Torfaen.
- 1.1.3 The following research report provides a detailed account of the research findings. It demonstrates that there is evidence of successful joint working and a great deal of effective provision in Torfaen that is received well, and valued by local vulnerable YP. However, the research also reveals key deficiencies that must be addressed in the improved model of accommodation and support provision.
- 1.1.4 This research report provides three key outputs: (1) It highlights good practice and key deficiencies in existing provision. (2) It provides an analysis of the pathways vulnerable YP take through accommodation in Torfaen and (3) It recommends improvements to the 'system of services' and proposes an alternative model of accommodation and support provision in Torfaen.
- 1.1.5 The report is presented in four sections. **Section One** (Introduction and context) briefly discusses the current local and UK context; it presents a summary of key literature; and it describes the methods used in this study. **Section two** (Current system of services) presents a review of key local and national policy documents; it includes a map of local housing and related support services; and drawing on interviews with young people, it describes the housing pathways currently taken by homeless young people in Torfaen. **Section three** (Analysis of the homelessness system) constitutes the main part of the report and identifies eight issues: for each issue the report identifies any good practice, deficiencies and potential improvements. **Section four** (Towards a comprehensive and improved system of services) is the final chapter, it summarises the key findings and puts forward recommendations for an improved system of services.

1.2 Context

- 1.2.1 This brief section of the report draws upon secondary data and existing literature to provide important local and national context for the study.

The local context

- 1.2.2 Torfaen comprises three urban centres: Cwmbran, Pontypool and Blaenavon. The housing markets in these areas, and across Torfaen, incorporate a relatively high proportion of social housing (22.3%) when compared to the Wales average (13.2%). However, Torfaen County Borough Council is no longer a social landlord as registered social landlords now provide all social housing. Despite an increase in the number of new affordable homes that became available for Torfaen residents between 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 (from 71 to 92 respectively) the number of new homeless presentations increased from 352 to 399 in the same period.
- 1.2.3 Torfaen County Borough Council works together with statutory and voluntary partners to meet the needs of homeless young people by providing accommodation, advice and support. Currently, there are eight floating support units dedicated to young vulnerable people run by Gwalia Care & Support, comprising 0.3% of the total supply map for Supporting People (SP) services in Torfaen. Additionally, there is purpose built supported living accommodation (20-beds) at Hales House in Pontypool run by Solas. This totals 0.7% of the SP supply map. Young vulnerable people can also access a range of other SP funded services in Torfaen provided by a variety of service providers such as Hafan Cymru, Torfaen Mind and Gwalia Care and Support (see section 2.3 of this report for the range of services local vulnerable people can seek support from).
- 1.2.4 The Torfaen SP Needs Mapping Exercise in 2007 revealed that out of the 1,638 respondents, 253 young single homeless people and care leavers expressed a need for housing support. The data also indicated that young care leavers are likely to have complex and multiple support needs that relate not only to homelessness, but also to other issues such as mental health problems and offending behaviour. The Gwent Needs Mapping Exercise data also indicated that the housing related support requirements of younger people (16-24 year olds) are likely to be the practicalities of setting up and maintaining a home, financial and benefits advice as well as emotional support.
- 1.2.5 The current research aims to evaluate the 'system of services' available for young vulnerable people in Torfaen. However, all service recommendations as a result of this research need to be taken in context of the current economical and financial climate. The SP operational plan (2009/2010) states that steady increases in local house prices have led to more people being priced out of the market and poses serious affordability and supply issues for local people. This has resulted in the Council, and its partners, dealing with a larger number and variety of applications than in the past. Vulnerable young people are facing more housing challenges than ever and coupled with additional workload and financial restraints on Local Authority departments, it has never been so important for services to work together to effectively target resources to best support vulnerable young people.

The UK context

- 1.2.6 The outcome of the comprehensive spending review (October 2010) clearly indicates a reduction in public spending which will no doubt have an impact on local authorities ability to fund frontline services. The spending review settlement forecasts that total expenditure by local authorities will fall by 30 per cent by 2014-15. Despite the promise of continuing, but more modest, capital investment in social housing, departmental budgets (other than health and overseas aid) will be cut by an average of 19 per cent over the next four years.

- 1.2.7 Recent economic, social and political change has resulted in a lot of uncertainty in the housing options of young people, so the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has funded Cardiff University and Shelter Cymru to consider what the situation might be like for young people (aged 16-30) in 2020 (Clapham *et al.*, 2010). The study will identify the key drivers likely to influence the housing options of young people in the next ten years. Informed by discussions with 50 stakeholders and 50 young people across the UK, some of the initial results are discussed below. These provide a useful context to the current study.
- 1.2.8 Many stakeholders believe the changing nature of social housing stock will be a key driver in shaping the housing options of young people over the next 10 years. Stakeholders do not expect the supply of non-market housing to meet future need. Holmans and Monk (2010) sets out projected affordable housing need across the UK (5,100 in Wales), but it is thought that proposed Government spending cuts will mean reduced investment in new social housing and consequently the targets may be missed.
- 1.2.9 According to Clapham *et al.* (2010), over the next ten years the private rented sector (PRS) will be increasingly significant in housing young people. The Office of National Statistics (2010) highlighted that the PRS has accounted for an increasing proportion of households in the UK over the last decade. Many stakeholders believe that a current shortage of social housing has led to many young people who claim housing benefits having to seek accommodation in the PRS. Existing literature highlights that for those young people dependent upon housing benefit, the PRS has always been problematic. First, there is a shortfall of accommodation within the PRS that meets Shared Room Rate policy, which results in young people having to pay rents above the value of their benefit receipts. Secondly, many private landlords are reluctant or unwilling to let to younger benefit claimants due to their perception of young tenants as a risk. As such, young people dependant on housing benefit attempting to access the PRS may be doubly penalised.
- 1.2.10 The second welfare benefit change is the reduction in the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to cover only the lowest third (30%) of local rents. Stakeholders explain that this will mean fewer properties are available at a rent covered by LHA, and more people will have to pay a shortfall between the level of benefit and rent. For example, capping the LHA at the 30th percentile of rents in an area where 35 or 40 per cent of private renters are claiming housing benefit will inevitably result in a proportion of claimants being unable to find accommodation within their benefit entitlement (Diacon *et al.*, 2010).
- 1.2.11 According to the Department of Work and Pensions' impact assessment, the package of reforms due in 2011/12 would affect 48,530 of the 48,710 claimants receiving LHA in Wales. This means that almost 100% of claimants would be losers and the average loss would be £9 per week or £468 per year (Department of Work and Pensions, 23 July 2010).
- 1.2.12 The indicative levels of LHA published by the Rent Officer Service indicates that, in Torfaen, while there will not be a difference between the current rate of LHA for those on shared room rate, those in 1 bedroom, 2 bedroom, 3 bedroom and 4 bedroom properties will experience lower levels of benefit (Table 1).

Table 1. Changes to LHA in Torfaen

	Shared room rate	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
October 2010	60	86.54	103.85	115.38	115.89
October 2010 - indicative	60	80.77	92.31	110.39	128.08

- 1.2.13 As many households dependent upon the LHA in the private rented sector are already known to be paying shortfalls between the benefit paid and the level of rent charged, it is anticipated that further cuts to the level of benefit will make the costs of accommodation unaffordable to a proportion of claimants. A proportion of those who are unable to afford their accommodation and are similarly unable to negotiate lower rental costs will approach the local authority for assistance. The Department of Work and Pensions impact assessment shows that, in Torfaen, a 100% of those in 1 bedroom, 2 bedroom, 3 bedroom and 4 bedroom properties will lose under the proposed package of reforms.
- 1.2.14 As part of a study exploring the potential impacts of the package of LHA reforms proposed for 2010/11 (30th percentile, bedroom caps, loss of £15), Cambridge University commissioned a YouGov poll (August 2010¹) and the results show that 26% of those who were unable to keep up with the housing costs and lost their homes would approach the local authority for assistance.

“The expected outcome will be an increase in financial hardship, rising levels of homelessness and pressure on public services.” WLGA 2010

- 1.2.15 The WLGA (Finch, 2010) state that rises in non-dependent deductions may lead to additional family conflict that could result in young people leaving the family home and becoming homeless.
- 1.2.16 Additionally, housing benefit will be linked to the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rather than the higher Retail Price Index from 2013/14. Shelter (Briefing on Housing Benefit announcements, 2010) warns that although rental costs are included in the CPI, the full impact of rent increases tends not to be reflected, meaning the CPI may not increase at the same rate as average rents. This is likely to have a considerable impact on the affordability of local housing for vulnerable young people.
- 1.2.17 The coalition government’s plans to reform the welfare system also include the introduction of a ‘universal payment’ in order streamline benefit payments to claimants (to be phased in from 2013). The government states that this simplification of benefit payments will guarantee that anyone who takes work will not be worse off than if they would have stayed on benefits. There is a lack of detail on the ‘universal payment’ at present so it is no possible to accurately speculate on what affect this will have on local vulnerable young people.
- 1.2.18 During the Cardiff University/Shelter Cymru research, stakeholders believed that changes to ‘housing-related support services’ would be one of the key drivers likely to influence the housing choices of young people over the next ten years. The majority of stakeholders believe housing-related support services play a key role in meeting the needs of vulnerable young people. The SP Programme predominantly delivers housing-related support services, and a recent evaluation of this programme for Communities and Local Government found that it delivers a net benefit of £2.77 billion against an overall investment of £1.55 billion (Ashton and Turl, 2008). Clapham *et al.* (2010) identified concerns that there will be a significant reduction in the financing of housing-related support services.
- 1.2.19 The distribution and commissioning of Supporting People funds is currently under review. There is widespread acknowledgement that there is an uneven distribution of the funding across Welsh local authorities due to funding being distributed according to the amount of money being claimed through ‘transitional housing benefit’ – the take up of which varies amongst local authorities (Supporting People – consultation draft, 2009). The recent WAG commissioned review of the SP Programme in Wales led by Sir Professor Mansel Ayleward recommends the introduction of a single funding stream to replace Supporting People Grant and Supporting People Revenue Grant to be named Supporting

¹ http://media.shelter.org.uk/Press-releases/Cuts-to-local-housing-allowance-will-cost-120-million-a-year-due-to-rising-homelessness-33f.aspx#_ftnref2

People Programme Grant and weights allocation on an indicative redistribution initial formula. This is likely to be developed and phased in over the coming years. This is likely to have a significant impact upon the capacity of Local Authorities to manage the SP Programme and upon development and commissioning decisions.

The impact of the Southwark Judgment

- 1.2.20 The Torfaen Young People's Support Service Annual Report (2009/2010) states that there are a number of challenges for the year ahead including the implications of the Southwark judgment in relation to homeless young people aged 16 and 17. This clarification of the law could potentially result in the costs of accommodating and supporting homelessness young people falling on Local Authority Social Services Departments rather than housing and homelessness sectors. Although the impact of the Southwark judgment is not yet fully understood, it will inevitably put workload and financial pressures on Torfaen's social service department as the number of Section 20 accommodation and support will increase. The issue of where the additional money will come from and how Supporting People can best target their resources are likely to lead to increased pressure.

1.3 Literature Review (good practice)

1.3.1 The aim of this brief literature review is not to repeat the mountainous volume of work on the causes of youth homelessness, instead it provides a useful summary of the key traits of services that effectively meet the needs of homeless young people and young people leaving care. Furthermore, brief case studies are included to illustrate forms of good practice. The findings of the literature review are presented thematically but it is also useful to direct the reader to the key literature cited in this review:

- Quilgars, D., Johnsen, S. and Pleace, N. (2008) *Youth homelessness in the UK: A decade of progress?* JRF: York
- Pawson, H, Netto, G. and Jones, C. (2006) *Homelessness Prevention: A good Practice Guide* Communities and Local Government: London
- Communities and Local Government (2007) *Tackling youth homelessness: Policy briefing 18*
- Communities and Local Government National Youth Homeless Scheme Website: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness>
- Shelter (2009) *Improving outcomes for children and young people in housing need: A benchmarking guide for joint working between services*

Partnership working

1.3.2 According to the CLG National youth Homelessness Scheme, it is widely accepted that partnership working is part of a good practice approach to the delivery of homelessness support and advice. It is claimed that statutory partners should include Children's Services, Supporting People teams, Primary Care, Youth Offending, Drugs Teams, as well as other teams within the Housing Authority. Additional partners are likely to include specialist service and accommodation providers as well as housing associations.

SWANSEA FAMILY INTERVENTION PROJECT

An example of effective joint working is the 'Swansea Family Intervention Project' (cited in the draft consultation paper 'joining things up'). The Welsh Assembly Government Social Housing Management Grant programme, the local authority Supporting People team and Swansea Youth Offending Service fund the project. This project works with families under threat of eviction or other legal sanction related to their alleged anti-social behaviour. The project takes a 'twin-track' approach using both support and enforcement.

OXFORDSHIRE JOINT COMMISSIONING

An example of strategic commissioning for housing vulnerable young people is a project in Oxfordshire. A joint housing team was created and Oxfordshire's Children's Social Care, the Youth Offending Service and Oxford City Council funded a post to manage the team. A joint strategy was developed and funding combined from various departments in order to meet the needs of all vulnerable young people in Oxfordshire, which encompasses a clear pathway of services. The service pathway has a single point of referral and includes services that provide emergency accommodation and short and long-term supported housing. It is reported that this approach has led to a 20% efficiency saving in the county while maintaining levels of provision.

Prevention

- 1.3.3 Reportedly, it is increasingly difficult for local authorities to sustain previous practices in homeless acceptances because too many young people are offered permanent accommodation which they cannot sustain and the experience of homelessness can be damaging, adding to the difficulties of vulnerable young people. Consequently, local authorities are introducing more preventative measures, including work with younger children and whole families.
- 1.3.4 The National Audit Office estimates that local and central government together spend about £1billion per year on homelessness. However, research undertaken by Heriot-Watt University (2007) states that preventing homelessness can achieve direct cashable savings for local government. They argue that preventing homelessness can save money when compared to the cost of assisting someone who is already homeless. Thus an argument exists for local authorities to continue to focus on preventing homelessness in order to generate savings for their authority and other public sector bodies.
- 1.3.5 There is increasing diversity in the range of homeless prevention interventions being implemented across the UK. Several key interventions are described in this sub-section. First, pre-crisis education provision is increasingly regarded as a key prevention mechanism. It is widely recognised that children between the ages of 8 and 13 years, experience important transitions and this presents a key opportunity to introduce preventative work. The National Youth Homelessness Scheme claims that this preventative work might take the form of peer education. This work involves raising awareness of and challenging myths about homelessness; developing an understanding of what causes homelessness and giving information to young people and school staff about where to go if there is a risk of homelessness.

SHELTER CYMRU PEER EDUCATION SERVICE

Shelter Cymru uses 'Peer Educators' in order to raise awareness amongst young people of issues surrounding housing and homelessness. Shelter Cymru recruits vulnerable young people who have experienced homelessness and housing problems, and involve them in a project to increase their confidence and develop new skills. As well as the benefit to the Peer Educator, this method is also an extremely effective way to inform young people on housing and homelessness issues.

More details can be found at: www.sheltercymru.org.uk/early/display-early.aspx?Parentid=10&year=&pageid=29&subcat=45

- 1.3.6 Hannon et al., (2010) provide an argument for investing in pre-crisis preventative measures in their report 'In Loca Parentis'. The report examines the benefits of reconfiguring the care system to avoid the delay, instability and abrupt transitions that many young people still experience. They state that such a pro-active care system would be cost-effective for the state. They concluded that a shift of resources and investment is needed to the beginning of a child's care journey in order to minimise the costs associated with unstable and unhappy early care experiences.
- 1.3.7 In addition to pre-crisis education, the National Youth Homelessness Scheme purports that early advice is essential for young people facing everyday problems such as relationship, money, rented housing and education issues. They claim that timely provision of education, information and advice on the inter-related emotional, practical, personal and legal issues affecting a vulnerable young person can make all the difference.

TORFAEN VOLUNTARY ALLIANCE INFORMATION BOOKLET

Torfaen Voluntary Alliance has produced a booklet for young people for when they first move into their own tenancies. It contains practical life skills on running a home and also contains contact details of local service that may be of use to the young person. (Cited in the draft consultation of ‘ joining things up’)

More details can be found at:

www.torfaenvoluntaryalliance.org.uk/sectionHome.asp?z_sectionId=2&z_LF=0

- 1.3.8 Finally, mediation and home visiting are increasingly being used to prevent youth homelessness.

LLAMAU MEDIATION SERVICES

Recognising that family relationship breakdown is the main cause of homelessness amongst young people, Llamau provides family mediation services in nine local authority areas in South Wales. The Mediation Service is available to all 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homeless and referrals are made via any service, organisation or self-referral.

Find more details at: www.llamau.org.uk

Notably, Relate has also developed a new Standards Framework for Homelessness Mediation for local authorities setting up a new service, those assessing an existing one and other agencies in the homelessness prevention sector.

Housing pathways

- 1.3.9 According to the National Youth Homelessness scheme, a ‘pathways’ approach is recommended. They claim that the aim of an accommodation pathway is to enable young people to move through services in a structured way, moving from more intensively supported accommodation to more independent accommodation as they develop life skills and confidence.

BRIGHTON AND HOVE PATHWAYS MODEL

An example of this in practice is Brighton and Hove Council who uses a pathways model to support homeless young people to independent living. The ethos is to enable people to move through services in a structured way via three stages of supported housing (hostels, intensive floating support and low structured support) and then onto independent living with tenancy sustainment. On moving into independent living all YP have a re-engagement plan in case they need more support (Cited in the draft consultation of ‘ joining things up’).

Find more details at: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1157503

Meeting wider needs

- 1.3.10 There is clear evidence that a high proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness are likely to have experiences that have reduced their resilience and mental, emotional or physical resources to make the transition to adulthood. Moreover, it appears that young people who are homeless or have become detached from long-term family support are expected to make the transition more quickly than others. Consequently, the National Youth Homelessness Scheme claims that services which seek to support homeless young people must address their wider needs (see Table 1).

Table 1. Wider needs that must be considered when supporting young people

General needs	Specific issues
Health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sex and relationships▪ Young parents/ pregnancy and parenthood; emotional and mental well-being▪ Healthy eating▪ Physical activity including play▪ Looking after yourself
Learning and work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Engaging and incentivising young people▪ Assessing needs and setting goals▪ Skills development▪ Support for individual learning and choice
Antisocial behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Protect neighbourhoods and communities▪ Address underlying causes of ASB

RHONDDA CYNON TAF TRAINING SCHEME

An example of good practice is Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council who has provided six training places a year for care leavers. This training period lasts for two years and costs the council approximately £12,000 per year per young person. A number of the young people have gone on to get permanent jobs with the council following this training period. (Cited in the draft consultation of 'joining things up')

Find more details at: www.rhondda-cynon-taf.gov.uk

Ethos

1.3.11 Pawson et al. (2006) identify ethos as essential to successful homelessness prevention. They claim that the following characteristics are important:

- Homelessness prevention interventions should not be targeted exclusively towards households judged likely to meet the 'priority need' test
- Encourage homelessness staff to see their role as primarily about assisting clients to avoid homelessness rather than rationing social housing
- Consider whether existing procedures lay sufficient stress on the value of home visits by homelessness officers
- Design monitoring systems for homelessness prevention to collect data on interventions, on service user outcomes and on service quality

Using the Private Rented Sector

1.3.12 Increasingly, the Private Rented Sector is being used to meet the accommodation needs of homeless people. Pawson et al. (2006) propose that the following considerations should be made when dealing with the Private Rented Sector:

- Where Local Authority financial assistance is made available in the form of straightforward cash deposits, or grants (rather than deposit guarantees), Local Authorities should use the resulting leverage to secure acceptable property conditions and tenancy terms beyond the six-month

legal minimum. However, in Torfaen, financial assistance is in the form of the homelessness prevention fund and housing benefit discretionary payments.

- Promote, to potential customers, the benefits of accessing private tenancies through rent deposit schemes – e.g. greater choice of house type and location than may be the case with respect to social housing. However, there are challenges for the local authority in Torfaen utilising the PRS to house vulnerable young people. Firstly, the local market conditions pose one particular challenge - the PRS tenants in Torfaen tend to be a static population, with very little in or out migration in the county borough. Thus there is a shortage of available PRS properties that can be utilised for young vulnerable people. Secondly, the legislation around the Shared Room Rate for young people under 25 (explored in greater depth later in the report) poses a further challenge for using the PRS as a realistic option for homeless young people. Finally, the PRS is typically viewed as a less secure means of housing and it would be important to ensure that any young people who were housed there were placed in good quality accommodation and that they had access to the necessary support to ensure they were able to maintain their tenancies. Thus while the PRS in Torfaen may have potential as a means of housing young vulnerable people, it is not without its challenges and risks.

- 1.3.13 The department for work and pensions (DWP) suggests that relationships should be forged with landlords in order to make it easier for them to contact the Local Authority when they have a tenant in arrears. Reportedly this may alleviate concerns about renting to tenants in receipt of housing benefit.

COVENTRY HOMELESS PEOPLE TO PRIVATE RENTED SCHEME

The Homeless People to Private Rented (HPPR) scheme operated by Coventry's Benefit Service and the Nominations and Advice service identifies options within the PRS for people who have presented themselves as homeless. The team cultivate a database of landlords who can provide suitable accommodation and the landlords provide the properties without a deposit on the condition that benefits will be paid directly to the landlord for the first 12 months of the tenancy. Additionally, during the first 12 months the Safeguard and Resettlement officer and the Money Management advisor will work with the tenant to prepare them for independent living and financial independence.

Tenancy sustainment

- 1.3.14 Effective tenancy sustainment is seen as an essential element of homelessness prevention. Pawson et al. (2006) propose that the following considerations should be made:
- Tenancy sustainment services need to be effectively targeted through early assessment of the needs of potentially vulnerable tenants by social landlords and housing advice agencies
 - The prospects of successful intervention are boosted by timely action, and the facility for the continued accessibility of the service even after a case is 'closed'
 - Encourage private landlords to make early contact with 'landlord liaison' staff in the event of problems that could lead to tenancy termination.

- 1.3.15 Additionally, pre-tenancy work may be imperative in order to equip the young person with the skills needed to maintain their own tenancies.

AGORFA PRE-TENANCY SUPPORT

An example of pre-tenancy work is the work of Agorfa who support vulnerable people in Private Rented Sector tenancies across a number of areas in North Wales. They have provided a workbook that details the apparent need for pre-tenancy work to take place before the person moves into their own tenancy. (Cited in the draft consultation of 'joining things up')

1.4 Methods

- 1.4.1 In order to meet the research objectives, young people (YP) and the professionals working with them had to be at the centre of this study. Details on each aspect of the method are given below.

Literature review

- 1.4.2 The research team undertook a literature and policy review to provide a summary of the local and national policy contexts. It also presents practical examples of service provision that effectively meets the needs of homeless young people and young people leaving care.

Self-completion stakeholder questionnaires

- 1.4.3 The research team developed a 10-item questionnaire that aimed to gauge a wide range of stakeholder opinions on the housing and related support provision for young vulnerable people in Torfaen. The questionnaire assessed how stakeholders view their service in terms of their ability to work with, and support, local vulnerable YP and how they view the housing and support provision for YP in Torfaen. Respondents were asked to rate the questionnaire statements on a likert-type scale with responses ranging from 'strongly disagree' through to 'strongly agree'. The questionnaire referred to 'young people' and this was defined as any person between the ages of 16 and 25. The questionnaire aimed to give the research team an insight into how service providers rate their own services, evidence good practice and provide a general overview of any areas that require improvement.
- 1.4.4 Questionnaires were distributed to a wide range of stakeholders in Torfaen. Stakeholders included members of the Supporting People (SP) team, Social Care & Housing, Health, Education, YOT and various voluntary services and projects. Questionnaires were distributed to approximately 120 stakeholders via email or face-to-face with follow-up phone calls and chasers by Shelter Cymru's Senior Research Officer and the Supporting People Planning Group. Seventy-six questionnaires were returned, making the response rate approximately 63%. This is considerably higher than the frequently quoted 30-40% return rate with questionnaire surveys.

Service provider and local authority in-depth interviews

- 1.4.5 The in-depth interviews with key staff aimed to i] accrue a deeper understanding of the 'system of services' in Torfaen, ii] reveal the perceptions of service providers on current policy and service provision and give workers the opportunity to identify and discuss some of the support needs of young people, and iii] Identify what aspects of current policy and practice key staff believe work, and which do not.
- 1.4.6 The Supporting People Planning Group provided initial contacts for stakeholders and then a snowballing technique was used to gather the thoughts and opinions of a wider range of local service providers. Interviews with 42 Torfaen stakeholders were undertaken. Shelter Cymru's Senior Research Officer conducted all of the stakeholder interviews. Interviews were either face-to-face or conducted over the telephone. The majority of the interviews took place with just the participant and Senior Research Officer present, however two group interviews were held. Interviews were conducted with both management and frontline workers in numerous areas including Health and Social Care, Housing, SP, Youth Offending Team, Education and different voluntary groups and projects. The interviews also included the views of three local foster carers.

Interviews with vulnerable young people

- 1.4.7 Central to the current research was the consideration of the experiences and perceptions of vulnerable YP. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were completed with 36 vulnerable YP in Torfaen, sampling from populations of YP who have used Social Care, Housing, SP and YOT services. The interviews explored their perceptions and experiences of services and accrued evidence regarding what YP think 'works' and where improvements to services could be made. The interviews also involved an autobiographical account of the YP's move from the family home through various accommodation types and support services to present day.
- 1.4.8 Torfaen's Supporting People Planning Group provided contact names for an initial sample of local YP, and then the research team used a 'snowballing' technique by approaching young service users at Torfaen's Young People Support Service, Hales House homelessness hostel and Cwmbran Centre for Young People. Interviews took place where the YP felt comfortable, predominantly in the support services offices or in the hostel where they were living. The study was explained in full to the vulnerable YP and informed consent gained. The YP were aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time.
- 1.4.9 The representative vulnerable YP sample contained:
- Both males and females
 - A range of ages between 16 and 25
 - Those who had experience of the care system as well as those who had not
 - Present and past service users
- 1.4.10 The research team undertook a unique approach to engage with local vulnerable YP. A 'Peer Research Officer' was employed for this purpose. The Peer Research Officer was a young person who had personal experience of being homeless and has some experience of undertaking interviews previously. This method works particularly well in terms of the engagement from participants and therefore the quality of information gathered. Young people often engage far more effectively with other young people who have faced similar experiences to them. A Peer Research Officer is also more likely to communicate in a language that is easily understood by the participants and understands the social norms associated with a particular population.
- 1.4.11 This method also provided an excellent opportunity for the Peer Research Officer to develop confidence and key research skills that can be used in future employment opportunities. Closely supported and supervised by the research team, the Peer Research Officer stated:

"I had a good time going up to Torfaen and meeting all of the young people and service providers. I got along with everyone I met and learned a lot from the process."

Ethical considerations

- 1.4.12 The research team take into account particular ethical considerations when carrying out research with YP. We ensured that the following steps were taken as a minimum. We ensured that:
- Staff in contact with YP, or who had access to personal information, were subject to a CRB check.
 - YP were fully informed of the project aims and were invited to take part (not pressured) – informed consent was gathered.
 - The possible impacts of their involvement were explained.

- YP were made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time without explanation.
- YP were informed before discussions begin that their comments were confidential. However, they were also made aware that confidentiality must be broken whenever a YP is at risk of 'significant harm' or other YP may be at risk of significant harm.
- Full feedback was offered to the YP.

Section 2

The current system of services

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 This chapter is the first of two results chapters and it has three aims: i] it identifies the housing and related support services currently available to young people in Torfaen, ii] it presents an analysis of current policies affecting homeless young people, and iii] it describes the housing pathways that young people take through the current system.

2.2 Policy Review

2.2.1 During the initial stages of the research, relevant overarching policy documents and service specific documents were collated and analysed. The analysis in this section is descriptive; implications for policy and practice are drawn out in the final chapter when all evidence is compiled. The key local and national documents were analysed for evidence of:

- Barriers/enablers to providing young people with choice and autonomy
- Barriers/enablers to early intervention/prevention
- Barriers/enablers to joint working between services
- Barriers/enablers to young person friendly services

2.2.2 The policy review explored the content of the following documents:

- Torfaen Supporting People Operational Plan 2010/11
- Torfaen Young People's Support Service Annual Report 2008/09
- Torfaen Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011
- Torfaen Country Borough Council Five Year Corporate Plan
- WAG Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales 2009-2019
- CLG Guidance to Children's Services authorities and local housing authorities about their duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to secure or provide accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year old young people
- Housing Joint Allocation Policy (Common Housing Register)

Choice and autonomy

2.2.3 The joint allocations policy between Torfaen CBC and local registered social landlords, including Bron Afon Community Housing, Melin Homes, Charter Housing Association, Linc Cymru and Hafod Housing (together referred to as 'the partnership'), outlines how the partnership will prioritise applicants for the houses they rent. The joint partnership allocates social rented housing in Torfaen to develop the 'common housing register' for those seeking homes in Torfaen. The joint allocations policy states that this allows for a straightforward application process for those who wish to register for local housing. The policy allows applicants to exercise choice in their accommodation where possible and appropriate.

2.2.4 Under the joint allocations policy, Gold band 1 (and hence high priority) is awarded to care leavers and is backdated to their 16th birthday giving care leavers in Torfaen a good chance of securing a property of their choice. Gold band 2 (also high priority) is awarded to applicants accepted as homeless, in priority need and unintentionally homeless by Torfaen CBC. Moderate priority is given to homeless (or threatened with homeless) applicants in Torfaen who have been determined as intentionally homeless. Thus vulnerable young people who find themselves homeless, whether care leavers or not, are given either high or medium priority on the common housing register giving them opportunities to obtain secure housing locally.

2.2.5 Additionally, the WAG 10 Year Homelessness Plan states that:

“Services should be empowering, allowing everyone to have choice, self-determination and control, giving homeless people maximum self-sufficiency and support to help themselves.”

Early intervention and prevention

- 2.2.6 There is clear evidence of the priority given to early intervention and preventative work in local and national strategic plans. The Torfaen Supporting People Operational Plan (SPOP) 2010-11 sets out plans for three preventative projects. The first project recognises that each year 4-6 young people leave care with high support needs that go unmet. The Plan proposes 4 units of 24 hour supported temporary shared accommodation with high intensity support. Demonstrating the success of Supporting People, Housing and Social Care (Children Services) joint working, this project became operational in December 2010.
- 2.2.7 The ethos of the Supporting People Programme is focused on the prevention agenda assisting people to live independent and fulfilled lives, through preventing and reducing homelessness (SPOP, 2010-11)
- 2.2.8 The Torfaen CBC Five Year Corporate Plan sets out several priorities relating to the prevention of homelessness, including; the introduction of a homelessness prevention programme for 15-18 year olds, alternatives to B&B accommodation, increased support for the private rented sector as a provider of accommodation, and support to private landlords to reduce evictions.
- 2.2.9 The WAG 10 Year Homelessness Plan undoubtedly prioritises prevention and early intervention, stating;

“Prevention should be the primary aim of all strategies and service planning to tackle homelessness.”

- 2.2.10 The Plan specifically recognises the importance of preventative work with young people, suggesting that prevention work must begin as early as possible, including education work to help them understand the risks of homelessness and how they can be avoided. The Plan also specifically prioritises the need for housing and social services to work together to prevent the breakdown of tenancies. This priority is echoed in guidance provide by the Department of Communities and Local Government, which states it is in the best interest of most young people aged 16 or 17 to live in the family home, although where this is not safe or appropriate, with responsible adults in their wider family and friends network. The guidance calls for local authorities to work pro-actively with young people and their families to identify and resolve the issues that have led to their homelessness crisis, which might reportedly involve family support such as family mediation or family group conferences. Despite the desirability of helping young people to remain at home, the guidance states that this preventative work should be undertaken alongside the statutory assessment processes and should not delay assessment or the delivery of statutory services.
- 2.2.11 The policy documents from Torfaen clearly indicate a focus on prevention and early intervention with regard to homelessness. The local authority housing service includes housing options that incorporate support workers and financial exclusion advice workers all with a focus on preventing housing difficulties before crisis.

Joint working between services

- 2.2.12 Local policy and service specific documents demonstrate a clear commitment to joint working between services. The Supporting People Operational Plan informs a range of statutory plans, including the Local Housing Strategy, the Community Plan and the Children and Young People’s Plan and it also contributes to many other planning and commissioning strategies such as Torfaen’s Corporate Plan and the Health Social Care and Well Being Strategy. The Supporting People Operational Plan

highlights the importance of the joint Supporting People and Homelessness Inclusive Forum, which is made up of local support providers and stakeholders with an interest in the Supporting People Programme and homelessness. It is clear from the plan that there is also collaborative commissioning across Gwent. The Gwent Supporting People teams have been nationally awarded for their cross border commissioning policy and practice.

- 2.2.13 The Torfaen Young People Support Service (TYPSS) Annual Report 2008/09 provides clear evidence of joint working between services. The service incorporates staff representing nine disciplines, all working from a shared base to co-ordinate the wide range of services a young person may need. The report claims that this holistic approach enables TYPSS to respond promptly, flexibly and effectively to the needs of some very vulnerable young people. Partners include: Torfaen Social Care and Housing Services, Youth Service, Education Service, Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Torfaen Local Health Board (LHB), Careers Wales Gwent, Llamau Emphasis Project, Fusion Substance Misuse Service, Citizens Advice. More recently a benefits advisor and NEETs youth worker have been added to the team.
- 2.2.14 The Torfaen Children and Young People's Plan 2008-11 sets out plans to work more closely with Bron Afon Housing Association which will reportedly ensure much wider access to housing. The need to work more closely with housing associations was also identified in the WAG Ten Year Homelessness Plan. The Ten Year Homelessness Plan identifies the need for effective information sharing protocols and referral mechanisms and states that a broad and diverse range of partners need to be involved in local planning, including: Local Health Boards, Youth Offending Teams, employment services, third sector organisations and the private rented sector.
- 2.2.15 The work between the partnership (Torfaen CBC and Registered Social Landlords) to produce the common housing register is an example of effective local joint working.
- 2.2.16 Finally, CLG guidance on duties to secure accommodation for 16-17 year olds states that integrated services can assist in the delivery of a seamless, child-centred response to the needs of 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The guidance also suggests that assessment will need to take into account every dimension of the young person's needs and, as well as the need for accommodation, it will be necessary to assess what further support the young person needs. The guidance provides an example of a homeless young person not participating in education or training who would need suitable accommodation in the first place but this would need to be arranged in conjunction with plans to re-engage them with education or training.

Young person friendly services

- 2.2.17 There is some evidence at local and national levels that young person friendly services are a priority. The Torfaen Young People Support Service Annual Report 2008/09 claims that the service focuses on the needs of the service users, stopping the 'pillar to post' experience that young people reportedly find confusing and frustrating. The report explains that TYPSS has developed an information sharing protocol, which is vital in removing the need for young people to have to explain their past experiences on three or more occasions. The TYPSS set up a Young People's Participation Group, which gives service users the opportunity to comment on service delivery and to highlight areas of need and unmet demand. Several recommendations from this group have been adopted.
- 2.2.18 Significantly the Torfaen Children and Young People's Plan 2008-11 prioritises the need to establish a profile of the workforce working with young people in order to implement changes that will ensure the workforce boasts a set of common core skills that are necessary for effective working with young people.
- 2.2.19 Finally, the WAG 10 Year Homelessness Plan suggests that:

“A variety of communication and engagement techniques, sensitive to the language and cultural needs of service users, need to be developed so that services are approachable and inclusive. “

2.3 Service mapping

- 2.3.1 This section provides a brief description of the range of housing and related support available for vulnerable young people (YP) in Torfaen. The findings do not purport to be an exhaustive list; nevertheless, the following are some of the key agencies working with vulnerable YP locally.

Accommodation

Bron Afon Community Housing

- 2.3.2 There are a number of registered social landlords in Torfaen including Bron Afon, Melin Homes, Charter Housing, Hafod Housing Association and Linc Cymru.
- 2.3.3 Torfaen council transferred their stock to Bron Afon in March 2008. Any tenant of the council automatically became a Bron Afon tenant following this. Bron Afon state that they have 8,036 affordable rented homes for people in housing need in Torfaen. They are involved with the H2H work with Hales House and their vulnerable young residents. H2H is a partnership project between Torfaen County Borough Council, Bron Afon Community Housing and young people from Hales House. YP may be able to take up apprenticeships with Bron Afon and the scheme also offers potential employment opportunities.
- 2.3.4 Bron Afon is also implementing a longer pre-tenancy interview for young tenants in order to identify any support need in advance. This is to stop tenancies from breaking down.
- 2.3.5 The SP funded 20 bed supported accommodation for young, single, homeless people in Pontypool, Torfaen is run by Solas and provides temporary accommodation for YP aged 16 – 24 years. Referrals are from the Council's Homelessness Team. Staff from SOLAS, which is part of the Seren Group, provide 24-hour support to the YP to help them learn the life skills needed to live independent lives and support the YP to develop the necessary skills to move on into their own more independent living.

Nethercourt Hostel

- 2.3.6 A council run independent unit. This hostel is not exclusive to young people.

Support

Social Care and Housing Services

- 2.3.7 The housing section sits within the Social Care & Housing service. The Housing Options service provides assistance with homelessness prevention, advice and information.
- 2.3.8 Within the Options team, there are temporary accommodation floating support officers who help homeless households in temporary accommodation to sustain their tenancies through independent living skills such as budget planning and domestic skills, etc.
- 2.3.9 Longer- term ambitions for Torfaen CBC are for the development of a comprehensive 'housing solutions' service to engage vulnerable people across a range of housing and support requirements.
- 2.3.10 Social Care Services also sit within the Social Care & Housing service area. They offer assistance to vulnerable young people when they deem it necessary while encouraging independence.
- 2.3.11 Funded through the Supporting People Programme Torfaen Floating Support offers housing related support to up to 232 people at any one time. TFS brings together 8 service providers (Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Hafan Cymru, Torfaen Womens Aid, Torfaen MIND, Gofal Cymru, Gwalia Care &

Support, TCBC and Age Concern) into one central referral and assessment route. Many young people access this service and it is provided free of charge.

- 2.3.12 The Cynnal Project by Gwalia Care & Support and funded through the SP Programme provides 8 young persons in children services with dedicated housing related floating support. Referrals come from the 16+ team.

Cwmbran Centre for Young People (CCYP)

- 2.3.13 CCYP is based in Cwmbran and is a drop-in centre for young people aged 11-25 years. YP can call in and use facilities like the X-box and table tennis and they can also take part in various activities such as arts and crafts and day trips away. They also provide a mentoring service for any YP who feels they need this support. They also provide support and guidance on getting a job, health issues, etc and when additional support is required they can refer YP on to other agencies.

Torfaen Young People Support Service (TYPSS)

- 2.3.14 This integrated multi-agency partnership provides support and assistance to vulnerable YP aged between 16-21 (or 25 for care leavers if they are in education). Some of the vulnerable YP they support include: looked after children or care leavers and those that are homeless. The support provided is dependent on an analysis of individual need. TYPSS is a flagship service and the only one of its kind in Wales.

- 2.3.15 The partners who work together include:

- Torfaen Social Care and Housing Services
- Youth Service
- Education Service
- Aneurin Bevan Health Board (Torfaen Locality Office)
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
- Careers Wales Gwent
- Llamau Emphasis Project
- Citizens Advice (CAB)

- 2.3.16 The 16+ team make up just over 50% of the TYPSS team. This team offers a support service for homeless 16 & 17 year olds. The Llamau Emphasis Project is an assertive outreach project that works with 14 to 19 year old young people who are not engaged with other services and YP who are most at risk of social exclusion through becoming homeless or being homeless. Llamau also have a family mediation service that operates in Torfaen as well as other Welsh locations. CAB has a welfare benefits advisor based at TYPSS, who also provides advice on housing and debt management.

- 2.3.17 The TYPSS vision is:

“Vulnerable young people, given effective support, encouragement and opportunities can develop the necessary skills and abilities to enable them to: overcome their difficulties; achieve their aspirations; successfully negotiate the transition to adulthood and participate socially and economically as citizens.” (TYPSS annual report 2009/2010)

- 2.3.18 TYPSS has developed an information sharing protocol in accordance to the Wales Accord on Sharing of Personal Information. This allows the sharing of personal information between colleagues that

eliminates the need for the vulnerable YP to tell their, often painful, stories to more than one professional in order to access to appropriate support. TYPSS is an excellent example of the positive joint working that is going on in Torfaen.

Torfaen County Borough Council - The Lighthouse, Torfaen's Multi-Agency Substance Misuse Centre

- 2.3.19 Various service providers are based in the building and together they deliver a substance misuse service. This service is for those of 18 years and over.

Youth Offending Team

- 2.3.20 Their aim is to prevent offending and re-offending by children and young people (aged 10-17). They undertake a holistic assessment of need and liaise with a range of agencies to meet those needs.

Detached outreach support

- 2.3.21 Works in conjunction with TYPSS and is available to vulnerable 16-21 year olds. The youth worker addresses whatever needs are identified.

The Chrysalis Centre

- 2.3.22 Funded by Supporting People, Torfaen Women's Aid and Hafan Cymru offer support and advice to women and children affected by domestic abuse. Hafan Cymru also offers support to females not linked to domestic abuse. These services run out of the Chrysalis Centre in Pontypool alongside other domestic abuse service providers in Torfaen. The Chrysalis Centre is a new Domestic Abuse Multi-Agency Centre for Torfaen.

The Doorway

- 2.3.23 The Doorway is seen as a 'mini-TYPSS'. It is a 16+ provision created in Blaenavon for vulnerable YP in the north of the borough.

2.4 Current homeless pathways in Torfaen

2.4.1 This chapter describes the current housing pathways of homeless young people in Torfaen. Whilst there is great heterogeneity in the experiences of young people, it is possible to draw out key trends. Figure 1 illustrates the two key pathways identified by the research; i] a *leaving care pathway* and ii] a *leaving home (service contact) pathway*. However, the research sample is likely to have influenced the nature of the pathways identified: key stakeholders suggest that there may be two additional pathways; iii] a *leaving home (no service contact) pathway*; and iv] a *leaving prison pathway*. This brief chapter will describe the trends in the pathways for which there are data and will comment on the possible trajectories of the other two pathways.

Leaving home (service contact) pathway

2.4.2 The majority of young people interviewed as part of this study appear to follow the *leaving home (service contact) pathway*. Figure 1 illustrates the types of moves that young people make within this pathway: thicker arrows indicate the most frequently taken routes. This brief section describes the key trends within this pathway. Firstly, it appears that most young people who leave the family home and become homeless, will initially find themselves sofa surfing. Only a very small number of young people will go straight into a hostel or a B&B. Secondly, the vast majority of young people will take a very linear route towards finding independent accommodation: most will exit sofa surfing into temporary hostel accommodation, before entering Hales House and finally moving into independent accommodation. A small proportion of interviewees did take more direct routes to independent accommodation, for example leaving a B&B directly into an independent flat. The third key trend is that some young people within this pathway have moved into independent accommodation and then experienced further homelessness. Returns into homelessness were to sofa surfing and temporary accommodation. Finally, some young people made returns to earlier stages in their homeless pathway. For example, one young person moved from a B&B back into sofa surfing. Service providers suggest that returns are likely to take place from all stages.

2.4.3 Interviews with young people in this pathway provide some understanding of their changing circumstances. In very broad terms, most young people left the family home due to relationship breakdown with their parents. Sometimes problems in the relationship related to alcohol or substance misuse and behavioural problems. It seems that young people focus on their individual actions as the main cause of their homelessness. Interestingly, approximately half of the young people were in education, training or employment throughout their homeless experience and the other half were NEET. There were similarly diverse experience of family and related support, where nearly half of the young people in this pathway found parental support gradually increased, particularly after moving to Hales House. For many others, there was no family support at all and only a minority had support for the entire period.

Leaving care pathway

2.4.4 Many of the young people interviewed as part of this study followed the *leaving care pathway*. Figure 1 illustrates the types of moves that young people make within this pathway: several key trends emerge. Firstly, homeless care leavers initially enter a range of accommodation types, including; B&Bs, Hales House and independent accommodation. This is significantly different to the experiences of people leaving the family home. Secondly, care leavers appear to make fairly direct moves from extremely temporary situations, such as sofa surfing, to more permanent independent accommodation. Again this is very different to the experiences of those leaving the family home. The third key trend mirrors the experiences of those leaving the family home, some care leavers move into independent

accommodation and then experience further homelessness. Returns into homelessness were to sofa surfing and temporary accommodation. Finally, service providers suggest that some young people are likely to make returns to earlier stages in their homeless pathway. Reportedly, this might take place at any point in their pathway.

- 2.4.5 Interviews with young people in this pathway provide some understanding of their changing circumstances. Care leavers provide many explanations about why they became homeless, including; behavioural issues, alcohol and substance misuse, budgeting difficulties and pregnancy. Like those who leave the family home, care leavers appear to focus on their individual actions as the main cause of their homelessness. Noticeably, the significant majority of young people in this pathway were NEET throughout their homeless experience, whereas young people leaving the family home had more diverse employment, education and training experiences. There is also a significant difference in the availability of family support between those leaving care and those leaving the family home. Care leavers mostly had no family support, although some claimed to have sporadic support.

Leaving home (no service contact) pathway

- 2.4.6 The study did not engage with young people in this pathway, hence it does not emerge from the direct accounts of young people. However, stakeholders in Torfaen explained that a proportion of young people who leave the family home and become homeless, will perhaps sofa surf but will not continue in the system of support. One of the main reasons is that some young people fall outside of priority need or they perceive that there will be no support available. Unfortunately the pathways of these individuals cannot be mapped but it is important to recognise that their needs must be accounted for in a revised system.

Leaving prison pathway

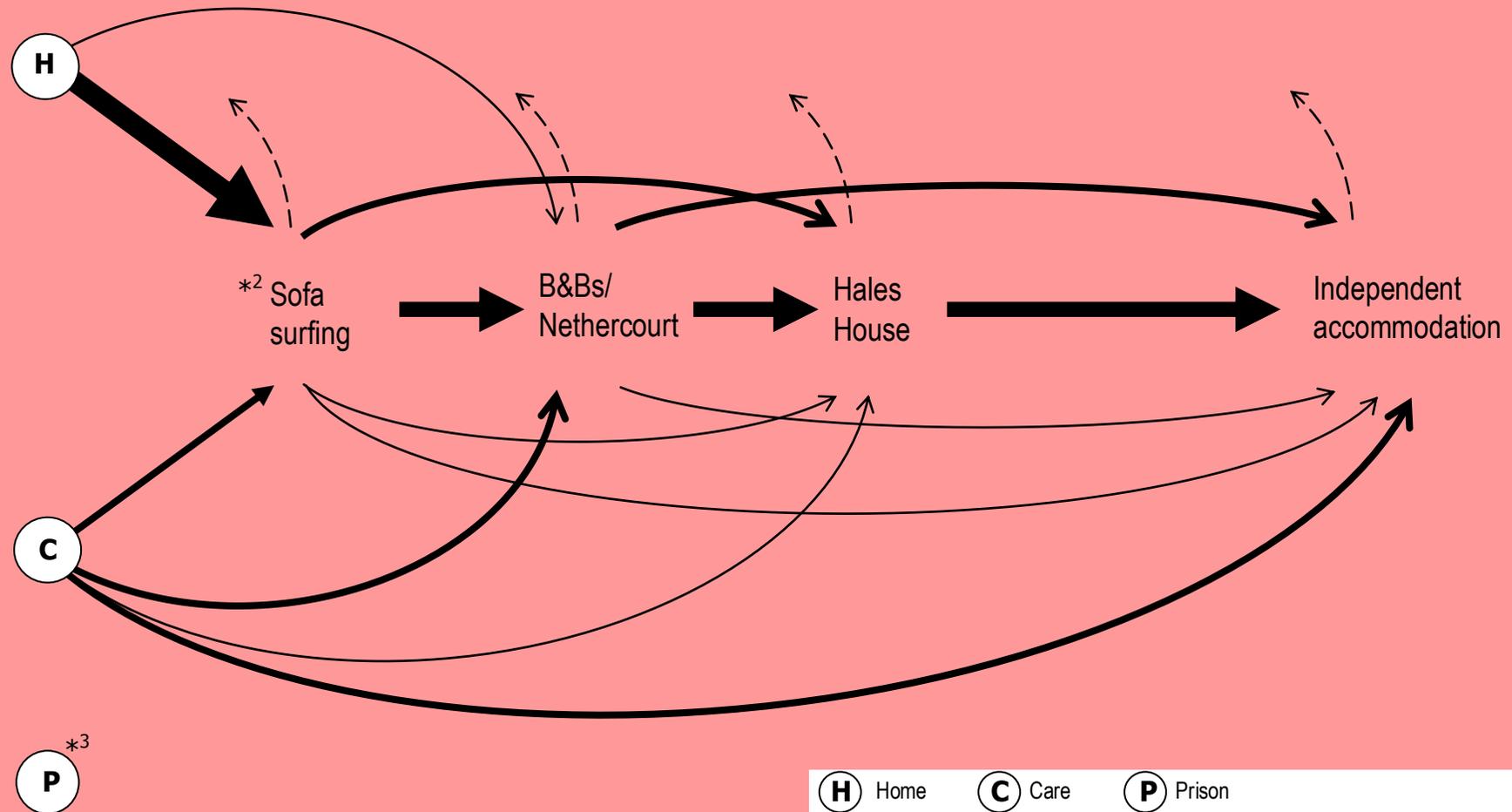
- 2.4.7 As with the *leaving home (no service contact) pathway*, the study did not identify particular pathways relating to young prison leavers. However, local stakeholders explained that a proportion of young people who leave prison will experience homelessness and their pathways are likely to be different in some way. For example, priority need status may result in initial transitions from prison to more permanent tenure arrangements whilst a further presentation may result in a different determination based on the reasons for the subsequent homelessness presentation.
- 2.4.8 There is currently a prisoner housing advice service linked to a regional approach in South East Wales whereby homelessness issues are addressed whilst in Prison (wherever possible) to offer homelessness prevention advice (eg linking with housing benefits for short term sentences and alternative housing options). This is very much in its infancy but provides local authorities with a 'heads up' of who to expect and what issues may arise to enable a more proactive service from Councils. In general, all homeless people released from prison would receive the same service in Torfaen. This would be similar to care leavers via the homelessness assessment process on subsequent presentations. Torfaen does not have a blanket policy that excludes prison leavers from the housing register and where necessary, and based upon evidence, uses the elements of the re-housing policy to assess unsuitability within the parameters of the test of unacceptable behaviour (via S160A 1996 Housing Act).

Using the pathways as a framework for further investigation of services in Torfaen

- 2.4.9 Many of the experiences of homeless young people will not be specific to a particular pathway, they may relate to a deficiency in a particular service or a particular unaddressed need that is more closely linked to geographical location, age or gender. Consequently, the main body of this review of homeless systems and services for young people in Torfaen is not structured around the four different

homeless pathways, instead it identifies and explores emerging issues under eight key themes: i] homelessness prevention; ii] emergency accommodation; iii] housing for particular groups; iv] move on and support; v] education, training and employment; vi] joint working; vii] county-wide provision; and viii] communication with vulnerable young people.

Figure 1. Current model of homeless pathways in Torfaen*¹



(H) Home **(C)** Care **(P)** Prison

*¹ Based on the findings of pathway interviews with 20 young people

*² A proportion of young people will enter the system at this point and will receive no statutory support. None of these young people were interviewed so their pathways are not represented in this map.

*³ A proportion of young people will become homeless after leaving prison. No young prison leaver pathways were identified so their pathways cannot be described.

↖ Pathway returns. At any time it is possible that a young person will return (planned or unplanned) to an earlier stage in the process (e.g. from a B&B to sofa surfing or to home).

Section 3

Analysis of the homelessness system

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This results chapter is structured around eight issues that emerge from questionnaires and interviews with stakeholders and in-depth interviews with young people: i] homelessness prevention; ii] provision and suitability of emergency accommodation; iii] provision and suitability of housing and related support for particular vulnerable groups; iv] support for vulnerable young people in their own tenancies; v] education, training and employment; vi] joint working; vii] county-wide provision; and viii] communicating with vulnerable young people. In each section evidence is presented on good practice, key concerns and potential service improvements. Due to the length and complexity of this chapter, key findings are highlighted at the start of each section.
- 3.1.2 Interviewees predominantly focussed on key deficiencies and gaps in existing service provision but it must be noted that the overwhelming perception of homelessness services for young people was positive. Amongst local service providers, 62% believe vulnerable young people value their service. In addition, the research team interviewed 36 local vulnerable young people, most of who stated that services have been very effective.

3.2 Homelessness prevention

KEY FINDINGS

- The evidence from the stakeholder interviews indicates many service providers are undertaking work to prevent housing difficulties, including education on independent living skills and mediation work. Notably, support with wider issues such as behavioural problems is perceived by stakeholders to be part of the Torfaen prevention agenda.
- Despite some good provision by the Llamau EMPHASIS team, there is perceived to be a lack of early education in schools on independent living skills and housing/homelessness advice.
- It was suggested that further preventative work could be undertaken by introducing a Housing Officer in the TYPSS building.
- Despite an effective mediation service provided by Llamau, it was claimed that more needs to be done with younger children aged 14 and 15 years. Moreover, mediation is reportedly used too frequently at the point of crisis, whereas it may be more effective before the young person and their family reach crisis point.

Good practice

- 3.2.1 The current research looked for ways in which vulnerable YP could be supported earlier with a view to reducing their risk of requiring housing or related support in the future. Many service providers said that there are teams within their departments that work towards preventing vulnerable YP reaching crisis point. Additionally, services can be viewed as preventative if they work towards stopping repeat homelessness.

“It’s not really applicable because we only get the referral when someone actually comes to us as homeless. Although we are actually a preventative service because we prevent people’s tenancies failing, we do provide a preventative service because we prevent tenancy failure, revolving door, that sort of stuff.” Torfaen Housing Worker (floating support)

“We’ve got a prevention team. What they do is get referrals from schools or community where there’s young people who are at risk of going through the courts system.” Youth Offending Team Worker

“Within the foster placement it’s independent living skills - teaching them to budget teaching them to cook, to care for themselves to run a bank account all the practicalities. Unfortunately, some of these young people don’t want that help. Their skills are often poor especially as they come into the care system quite late from a not very supportive family.” Torfaen Foster Carer

- 3.2.2 There is also evidence that TYPSS is working with YP before they turn 16 in order to assess any potential problems before the team starts to work with them on a more full-time basis:

“We do the employability group which brings them in earlier (than 16). We have them from their 15th birthday so they’re actually here and they get to know the team for the year before they actually move over to us within the leaving care so we can pinpoint any issues then.” TYPSS Worker

3.2.3 However, there is scope for further improvement. Analysis of the stakeholder self-completion surveys indicated that when asked whether they agreed with the statement: “we tend to intervene early in a young person’s life rather than intervene at crisis point,” only 32% of respondents think their service intervenes early rather than at crisis point, whereas 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed (with the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing). The results suggest that many stakeholders do not view their service working from an early intervention or prevention perspective. However, the high proportion of ambivalent answers (answered as neither agree nor disagree) may indicate that respondents find it hard to answer this question. Many services are geared to intervene at crisis point by the very nature of the service (for example, workers who only get referred to when someone becomes homeless). However, the results suggest there may exist a need for additional focus on early intervention and prevention services in Torfaen.

Early education

3.2.4 The Ten Year Homelessness Plan (2009) suggests prevention work should begin as soon as possible, including education, in order to help YP understand the risks of homelessness and be better prepared. Some stakeholders stated that core independent living skills should be taught to all YP in schools from an early age. One point is the need for independent living skills to be rolled out into schools via the Personal and Social Education (PSE) curriculum. The themes of early information and support were echoed in the service provider interviews.

“It’s not the teachers getting it wrong it’s the system. The people who are designing the format the procedures and the policies for the systems are getting it wrong. In terms of compulsory education where’s the compulsory education from year dot right through to the time you leave about parenting skills, about finances, budgeting, opening bank accounts.” TYPSS Worker

“I think we need to be talking to people early, we need to be giving them information and some of that is being a critical friend, it is not a case of things are going to fall into people’s laps, it is the fact that a commitment has to be made in terms of if you are taking on a tenancy, if you are taking on employment and that if you fail to do those things then there is a risk of those things going - losing a job, losing a position, losing a tenancy. I think it is preparing people for that kind of thing, but also making sure that there is that support” Torfaen Housing Worker

“You can’t predict when somebody is going to be asked to leave their parents house so it’s not as if you can get in at an earlier stage in terms of prevention in a specific case but as a wider option if they’re better informed about what their housing options are if they want to put in on the housing waiting list when they’re 16 and 17 they can (although most people think they can’t because they’re under 18) - it’s about having that advice and things at an earlier stage so even if it’s a case of going around schools and having surgeries where you give talks etc” Torfaen Housing Worker

3.2.5 The justification for life skills to be a compulsory part of the PSE curriculum is that there will be a generation of YP who grow up better prepared for independent living, even if these skills are not imparted at home. There is also the possibility that this will have a knock-on effect on future generations who could, in turn, learn these skills from their parents.

3.2.6 There is evidence to suggest that housing and homeless education is already being implemented in schools in Torfaen:

“Emphasis have got an education worker as part of their team so we try to get into as many schools as possible just to talk about what we do. That has been quite successful” Torfaen Emphasis Worker

“The employment education worker, they go in and talk to the young people about homelessness, what it means. It was set out at first as drugs and alcohol as part of the national curriculum. A guest speaker comes in from agencies drugs, alcohol, and law enforcement. It was expanded then to include other community based things like homelessness.” TYPSS Worker

- 3.2.7 However, as not all vulnerable YP will be attending school, it is also important to deliver independent living skills via establishments such as the pupil referral units and the Youth Offending Team. When asked if there was anything that could have helped them earlier. Some local vulnerable YP stated that they would have benefited from more information.

“I’d have like to have known where to go for help and I would have asked for help.” Female, 18, Cwmbran

“Yeah, people could have helped keep me out of trouble to start with. Keep younger people out of trouble. Start work with them younger then they may not get into trouble.” YP, Male, 17

- 3.2.8 Early prevention work was a theme discussed in relation to Social Services. However, a lack of resources is often a barrier to conducting prevention work with more YP and from an earlier age.

“Yeah we’re only getting involved at crises point more often than not but then the social workers are in a position by working with that young person from a young age they could be working with them to prevent them from reaching homelessness.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“I think that in the social work sector the child care teams that work with young people below 16 I think they could do a lot more preventative work there which would stop some of the young people becoming homeless and stop some of the older young people coming into care in their mid teens 14 or 15 but that level of work isn’t carried out these days. The demands on social workers are far greater today even than they were 10 years ago in terms of paperwork they have to fill in.” TYPSS Worker

- 3.2.9 One service provider suggested that a housing officer, rather than just a homelessness officer, could be based at TYPSS, thus allowing housing advice to be provided earlier rather than when the YP turns up at the homelessness department.²

“You could have a housing advisor based in TYPSS which could give general housing advice on a permanent basis and improve the knowledge of people in the team. Certainly down there they are dealing with more 16 and 17 year olds and more referrals are being made.” Torfaen Housing Worker

Mediation

- 3.2.10 Linked to early prevention work is increased mediation work between the YP and their family to assess if it is both feasible and safe for the YP to remain in their family home. The Llamau EMPHASIS project is based at TYPSS and provides a mediation service to 14-19 year olds who are most at risk of homelessness.

“They see us as somewhere you go when your parents have kicked you out so I think that perception needs to be changed. Mediation needs to be strengthened in terms of young people going there as a first port of call rather than just turning up on the day that they’re being excluded. I’d like to see every young person referred to mediation if it’s appropriate as long as there’s no domestic abuse or violence. I would like to see the young person at least meeting with the mediator and then if it goes no further it goes no further but I think sometimes if

² A housing officer was based in TYPSS in the past and it is not possible to ascertain the reason why this is no longer the case. However, the research evidence suggests that the inclusion of a housing officer at TYPSS may be worth exploring again.

they say no I'm not doing it then we just accept that and think alright then. I think really that should be pushed a little more." Torfaen Housing Worker

"We are only funded really to work with 16/17 year olds in family mediation but quite a few years now we have pushed that out to 14+. I think there is a place for it but it would be far more specialist and a different way of working. It would be lovely if we could have another mediation service to work with young people below the age but also working with the parents, so you would be doing more parenting type skills." Torfaen Emphasis Worker

- 3.2.11 Despite its potential, there is a danger that mediation becomes a default reaction in cases of YP and homelessness. It is a positive intervention for many but the need for it and its appropriateness should be assessed on an individual basis i.e. the young person approaching the homelessness service presents as homeless, they are assessed and options are discussed on the basis of that assessment.

3.3 The provision and suitability of emergency accommodation

KEY FINDINGS

- Young people have positive perspectives on the temporary accommodation and support provision at Hales House.
- There are concerns that the supply of temporary accommodation for young people is not sufficient to meet the demands of Torfaen's young homeless population.
- Both service providers and young people believe that too frequently, the temporary accommodation provided for homeless young people is inappropriate and of an insufficient standard.

Good practice

- 3.3.1 The county borough of Torfaen has provision in the form of 20 beds for homeless young people in Hales House, Pontypool funded through the SP Programme. The accommodation and related support was highly rated by the vulnerable young people the research team spoke to.

"Hales House - Yes they helped by giving me a place to live instead of sofa surfing." YP, 16-17, Torfaen

"Hales House is really good, you get supported there. It is a good place to stay and it helps you be more independent." YP, 18-24, Torfaen

The concerns

- 3.3.2 Despite the apparent high standard of some emergency accommodation provision, a major theme that arose during analysis of the service provider and vulnerable YP interviews was the lack of suitable accommodation for YP when they find themselves homeless.

"I would say Torfaen doesn't have homelessness provisions other than Hales House Hostel which has 20 units. I know we're a small authority but there are more than 20 young people who are homeless at any one point."
Torfaen Social Worker

- 3.3.3 It appears that some young people are being accommodated in inappropriate B&B accommodation, often whilst they wait for a place at Hales House. Notably, the use of B&B accommodation is restricted by law for those in priority need: the suitability of accommodation order (2006) states that B&B accommodation is only to be regarded suitable for a minor as long as they do not occupy a basic standard B&B for a period, or a total of periods³, that exceeds two weeks or they do not occupy a higher standard B&B for a period, or total periods⁴, that exceed six weeks⁵.

"Certainly in terms of young people who have been forced out of their home there isn't very much suitable temporary emergency accommodation at all in Torfaen. There is a reliance on bed and breakfast provision. Certainly one young girl I placed recently the door didn't seem to close properly. It was locked but she felt really

³ Post April 2nd 2007

⁴ Post April 2nd 2007

⁵ The exception being that the local authority has offered suitable alternative accommodation and the person has chosen to remain in the B&B accommodation

unsafe there... it was noisy and the other residents had different people in and out all the time... I think she felt pretty vulnerable.” Youth Offending Team Worker

*“The fact they put you in B&Bs and night shelters because you’re vulnerable it’s not a very safe place to be when people are taking drugs. There was one incident when I had to look after someone who overdosed on heroin.”
YP, Female*

- 3.3.4 Finally, it seems that young people are not only placed in B&B accommodation as a temporary measure, increasingly the Private Rented Sector is being used for those waiting to be accommodated in Hales House.

“I know that in the past year when the hostel has been full and there aren’t any bed and breakfasts, they were placing young people in private rented flats, unfurnished with no support so we are having a lot of referrals and a lot of drop ins from young people who are having no support.” Torfaen Project Worker

3.4 Provision and suitability of housing and related support for particular groups of young people

KEY FINDINGS

- It was widely recognised that care leavers in Torfaen receive very good leaving care support, a service that is reportedly needed due to the many challenges that young care leavers face.
- There are concerns regarding the lack of housing and related support available to single 18-24 year olds whom the Local Authority has no duty to accommodate. The Private Rented sector is reportedly very difficult to access due to Shared Room Rates and these young people are unlikely to receive priority for social housing. Moreover, these young people are thought to be at a high risk of being found intentionally homeless which further reduces their housing options. Reportedly, some of these young people now have to move to other local authority areas to meet their housing needs. It was suggested that good relationships must continue between local authority and registered social landlords in order to find housing solutions for 18-25 year olds.
- There are concerns that the housing needs of certain populations are not being met, such as: single mothers, those with disabilities and ex-offenders.
- The need to effectively support and house homeless 16 and 17 year olds was highlighted as an area of particular importance.

Introduction

- 3.4.1 This chapter first examines the unique situation for care leavers in Torfaen, before identifying the challenges and solutions to housing and support for vulnerable YP for whom there is no duty to accommodate. Following this, the chapter considers other groups of YP who require additional housing related support. Finally, the support offered to homeless 16 and 17 year olds is investigated.

Care leavers

- 3.4.2 Many service providers spoke of the excellent support available to care leavers once they have left the care system. However, there is concern amongst some service providers that YP who have not come via a care pathway may be disadvantaged in relation to housing and related support. Nevertheless, it is argued that in TYPSS they do provide services for all vulnerable YP, not just care leavers.

“They [care leavers] are probably in a slightly better position in that there is a statutory responsibility to them. It’s not done in crises as much it’s more of a planned move and that’s quite a positive thing.” Youth Offending Team Worker

“Obviously psychologically they are disadvantaged because they have been put through the system. But I think that they are advantaged rather than disadvantaged mainly because the corporate parent is responsible for the rent which means there is assistance to find a bond, they get a leaving care grant and they can go into private rented a little easier.” Torfaen Housing Worker

- 3.4.3 Conversely, rather than being in a stronger position, some service providers believe that care leavers are in a more disadvantaged position. Some local workers believe that the lack of stability and

isolation some care leavers experience means they are in need of more support compared to their peers who have not been in care.

“Care leavers struggle as opposed to other young people just going into housing they have had very little stability in life so they have been in foster care that has broken down or they’ve been in a different foster placements.”

Torfaen Housing Worker

“They’ve come back into the area from outside placements and they just haven’t got the support that even the young homeless have... you know they haven’t got parent support there’s normally some kind of family support grandparents or aunt uncles whereas the care leavers tend to be out on a limb regarding that.”

Torfaen Social Worker

- 3.4.4 Additionally, a unique barrier that care leavers may face when trying to successfully integrate into society is public attitudes. Many service providers believe that until this is addressed care leavers will face additional challenges why attempting to live independently.

“The care leavers they have got a stigma attached to them being in the care system [...] Certainly I’ve heard it from other professionals ‘in care is in trouble’. We don’t believe that that but it is an issue from the wider society and certainly from some professionals in related agencies.”

TYPSS Worker

- 3.4.5 Despite these challenges for young care leavers, the local service providers work to ensure that these YP are supported as fully as possible in order for them to lead independent and fulfilled lives. As one Torfaen stakeholder concluded on local care leavers:

“They do face some challenges on a number of fronts but we’re not doing too bad a job in Torfaen.”

Torfaen Housing Worker

Vulnerable YP in housing need for whom there is no duty to accommodate

The concern

- 3.4.6 Some service providers expressed concern regarding the housing and related support provision for vulnerable YP for whom the Local Authority has no duty to accommodate. During the analysis of the stakeholder self-completion questionnaires it transpired that 74% of local service providers agreed or strongly agreed that there is a lack of suitable and affordable accommodation for YP in Torfaen. The main population of concern is single YP who fall into the 18-24 age bracket. The general consensus was that those who had a care background, or those who were in the 16-17 age bracket, would be accommodated.

“I suppose my main concern is the gap in service between 18 and 24 year olds. That’s one of the biggest things that needs to be addressed. As much as you can improve the service for the 16 and 17 year olds there is a good effective service there at the moment for them there’s no accommodation, support and effective advice you can give an 18-24 year old who you haven’t got a duty to accommodate and I think there’s a massive gap there.”

Torfaen Housing Worker

“Definitely, there’s room for improvement that way. There’s a definite difference in the way the care leavers are treated as far as I can see to the way 16 and 17 year olds and any other 18-21 are treated and kind of that sticks with me. I know they [Social Services] have a responsibility to care leavers but I think all young people are vulnerable and perhaps need the same level of assistance.”

Torfaen Housing Worker

3.4.7 When the Local Authority does not have a duty to accommodate a homeless YP they can offer housing advice. One of the options they can talk to the YP about is renting in the Private Rented Sector (PRS). However, this is often an unachievable option for many local YP due to the Local Housing Allowance Rate stipulating that single persons under the age of 25 are only entitled to the 'Shared Room Rate' (SRR). The SRR in Torfaen is equivalent to £260.00 a month, as opposed to single people over 25 who may be entitled to £375.01 (the one bedroom rate if they rent a property of that size or any self-contained accommodation) a month. This reduced SRR rate for single people under 25 is based on the assumption that this age group can access and share accommodation with other people. However, due to the lack of available shared accommodation in Torfaen, renting in the PRS is an often unobtainable option for local people under 25.

"It's a massive difference [in LHA] they expect you to go and achieve shared accommodation as a private rent when there is none available in Torfaen. They expect you under homelessness as an 18-24 year old with no priority need issue to go and find your own emergency accommodation when there are no direct access hostels in Torfaen... there is nothing there in terms of provision certainly in Torfaen for 18-24 year olds." Torfaen Housing Worker

The recent spending cut announcement that there will be an increase in the age of the SRR from 25 to 35 (starting from 2012-13) is likely to increase this problem both locally and nationally.

3.4.8 However, the barriers here are, for the most part, outside of the control of workers.

"That's one of the biggest barriers in terms of the ones that we cannot get over because that's something that's controlled by central government. The 18-24 year olds simply don't get enough financial assistance to maintain their private rented tenancy, certainly not in Torfaen because there are no shared tenancies available." Torfaen Housing Worker

3.4.9 The options are also reduced for homeless single 18-24 year olds who wish to obtain social housing. Despite the effort of the housing department, a lack of housing stock means that these homeless YP may be without suitable accommodation for longer periods of time.

"In terms of social housing, even if you acknowledge them as homeless and we give them priority- and the house seekers which is silver banding - they are still potentially looking at months before seeking permanent housing and even then it could drag on to even longer than that depending on demand for housing which at the moment and it always is high so time frames are not good." Torfaen Housing Worker

3.4.10 Some service providers stated that homeless YP are often forced out of the borough to seek emergency accommodation and are also forced out to seek accommodation in the PRS elsewhere – often Newport or Cardiff where there is more shared accommodation. However, the vulnerable YP is then not only without housing, but also away from local support services and any existing social networks, which compounds their disadvantaged situation. Whilst they are still able to compete for housing locally in Torfaen, the initial crisis that sees them ostracised from the people and locations that are familiar to them, coupled with the often long waiting times for social housing, may result in substantial trauma to the already vulnerable YP.

3.4.11 Research evidence suggests that support is available for some vulnerable YP once they reach 18, however, the feeling is that barriers still exist.

"They can get the support- which is great - but you just want to have housing there as well" TYPSS Worker

“As soon as they [the YP] turn 18 the benefits system doesn’t want to know them. When they’re under 18 they’ve got people to fight for them. It seems to be as soon as you reach 18 everything is against you. They are still children at 18 from one day to the next day... I’ll support you today but tomorrow I can’t support you.” Hales House Worker

- 3.4.12 This population of 18-24 year old single people may find themselves with even fewer options if they are found to be ‘intentionally homeless’. Thus, this situation could lead to cases of ‘hidden homelessness’ as these vulnerable YP do not always present to the Local Authority.

“It’s too easy to concentrate on those people already picked up. It’s the people not coming through the system at all that we’re having the most concern about. They are not presenting as they don’t feel they’re going to get anywhere if they did... because they’re not priority need.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“When I was kicked out of the hostel I went to homelessness. They said I was intentionally homeless so they couldn’t or wouldn’t help. It wasn’t nice.” Male, 19, Torfaen

- 3.4.13 The concerns about some vulnerable YP not being able to access housing were mirrored in the interviews with YP. When asked what are the main challenges facing YP when getting accommodation in Torfaen, the majority of the YP who talked of difficulties with acquiring accommodation were males in the 18-24 age range.

“There aren’t enough places to go around. Most people at the age of 18 and homeless, it’s hard for them to get somewhere.” Male, 19, Torfaen

Exploring solutions

- 3.4.14 Reportedly, relationships need to be further developed with local registered social landlords, and other housing providers, so that they can be in a better position to understand some of the issues and vulnerabilities of the YP. The foundations would also be in place to work on negotiations that could prevent an eviction that could lead to an intentional homelessness decision

“Quite often if they do set up their first home it’s in social housing with registered social landlords so there’s sometimes a lack of understanding with our housing partners of some of the vulnerabilities and support needs of young people so we don’t always work together very well” Torfaen Housing Worker

“I guess it’s time really to set up the sort of joint working with the housing providers. When it was Torfaen council’s housing department we had some really excellent joint working going on then. I’m not quite sure that’s as effective as it used to be now that Bron Afon have taken over.” TYPSS Worker

- 3.4.15 On the other hand, a local registered social landlord, Bron Afon, have been extremely proactive in their work with the staff and YP at Hales House. There is clear a focus on prevention and the intention of extending the work with other YP. It is clear that these relationships should continue.

“My team takes action against young people when their tenancies are breaking down. But we’ve also started doing some work with Hales House started to do preventative work with them and looking at their needs and trying to build up the relationship with housing officer and the young person before they sign for the tenancy, maintaining that support but that is only the ones that go through the hostel but some of the things we’re doing we’re planning on eventually rolling out to other young people who are on our waiting list we’re trying to get the bit we’re doing in the Hostel right first before we roll it out.” Registered Social Landlord

Other groups of young people who require further housing and related support provision

3.4.16 During the research, there were also concerns regarding provisions for other groups of YP including: young single mothers, 14-15 year olds, those with physical disabilities and ex-offenders. Thus it is clear that in order to fully house and support the array of vulnerable YP in Torfaen, there needs to be some consideration given to the unique circumstances of certain groups for whom the meeting of their housing needs is particularly challenging.

“One lot of people that I think get overlooked, unless you are in Cardiff is single parents, especially young Mums as I don’t think that there is a lot of provision for them out there so I think that is a key issue that should be addressed. They can’t go to Hales House as single young parents are not allowed there, and there is definitely an increase in young people having children, and a lot of young single mums out there.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“I think maybe because TYPSS is a 16+ service then there is a lot of support for the 16+ people but we are finding the ones who are 14/15 who are made homeless or who are sofa surfing at a young age, I suppose in every area you work in there is not a lot of social services for 14/15 year olds who are in between houses really. They have to wait until they are 16 and then you can present them as homeless.” Llamau Project Worker

“Young people leaving care we’ve got support workers we haven’t got a supported housing scheme for people with physical disabilities.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“We deal a lot with young men and women leaving prison. They’re a priority need group but there’s very little support services out there. They’re in a circle then come back again.” Torfaen Housing Worker

3.4.17 Additionally, housing those with allegations of convictions may pose a problem in itself.

“I was just thinking of some of the young people who maybe don’t have convictions but have allegations of for example arson things serious allegations against them and about trying to find suitable accommodation for again the high risk people.” Youth Offending Team Worker

Providing correct and adequate support to 16 and 17 year olds

3.4.18 Many of the service providers believe that homeless 16-17 year olds are adequately provided for. However, there are concerns that even if a 16-17 year old is accommodated and supported at the initial crisis, they may become in need of additional housing and related support once they reach 18.

“If a young person presents as section 17 - which is a child in need- they come in at 16 they’re supported until 18. At 18 everything goes so pretty much you’ve got young people out there that don’t fit anywhere.” TYPSS Worker

3.4.19 In recent years a number of judgments have been handed down by the House of Lords to determine the inter-relationship between Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and Part VII of the Housing Act 1996⁶. These judgements apply to both England and Wales but have to be interpreted and applied slightly differently in Wales given the difference in the priority need categories for accommodation between the two countries.

3.4.20 In Wales all 16 and 17 year old homeless applicants will be deemed to have a priority need for accommodation under s.189 of the Housing Act 1996 by virtue of the Homeless Persons (Priority Need, Wales) Order 2001. The position is different in England. In English Authorities 16 and 17 year old applicants will only be deemed to have a priority need for accommodation under Part VII of the

⁶ R (M) v Hammersmith and Fulham [2008] UKHL 14 & R (G) v Southwark [2009] UKHL 26

Housing Act 1996 if those applicants have been assessed by the Social Services Department as not being Children in Need pursuant to s.17 of the Children Act 1989. In Wales homeless 16 and 17 year olds may have a duplicate accommodation duty owed to them from the outset by both Social Services (under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989) and housing services (pursuant to s.193 of the Housing Act 1996).

- 3.4.21 The judgements of those cases at footnote 6 confirmed that Section 20 of the 1989 Children's Act takes precedence over the duties in the 1996 Housing Act in providing for children in need who require accommodation. The judgments also clarify that section 20 of the Children's Act 1989 takes precedence over the general duty owed to children under Section 17 of the 1989 Act.
- 3.4.22 The Welsh Assembly Government issued guidance on 10th September 2010 to all Social Services Departments in Wales setting out how, in practice, homeless 16 & 17 year olds should be assessed. The guidance states that if a homeless 16 or 17 year old presents to the Housing Department and the Housing Authority have reason to believe that the applicant may be eligible for assistance and may be homeless then the Housing Authority will have an immediate duty to accommodate that applicant pursuant to s.188(1) of the Housing Act 1996. The accommodation must be suitable and the Housing Authority in considering the suitability of accommodation must have regard to the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation, Wales) Order 2006. This immediate duty owed by the Housing Authority exists irrespective of whether or no that applicant may also be owed a duty under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- 3.4.23 However, the question of whether the homeless applicant will be owed the full duty under s.193 of the Housing Act 1996 (assuming that the applicant is not found to be intentionally homeless) will depend on the outcome of the assessment undertaken by Social Services in respect of Section 20 of the 1989 Act. If Social Services conclude that a duty is owed under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 no further duty will be owed under Part 7 of the 1996 Act. The Authority has a duty to ensure the young person is suitably accommodated.
- 3.4.24 If the Social Services Authority deem that the 16/17 year applicant is not owed any duty under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 then the Housing Authority must continue (if it has not already concluded) its investigations under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.
- 3.4.25 In situations where the 16/17 year old applicant makes a decision to refuse assistance pursuant to Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 then it is the expectation of the Welsh Assembly Government that the applicant is not found to be intentionally homeless.⁷
- 3.4.26 It is important that close joint working protocols are established between children's services, housing departments, RSLs and all housing related support services in order to meet the needs of vulnerable homeless YP.

⁷ Welsh Assembly Statutory Guidance Circular 0025/2010 para.4.8

3.5 Support for vulnerable young people in their own tenancies

KEY FINDINGS

- Young people identified a range of examples of good practice interventions that are effective in supporting young people to maintain their tenancies, these include: emotional and mental health support; debt advice and substance misuse support.
- Some vulnerable young people are not aware of the support services available to them.
- Both local service providers and young people believe their needs to be more independent living support for young people in their own tenancies as without such support young people may face difficulties maintaining the tenancy and consequently facing eviction.
- There is concern that many young people leave Hales House where there is support 24 hour a day and move into accommodation where the levels of support are dramatically reduced.
- It was claimed that young people living in the Private Rented Sector are less likely to receive any form of independent living support.
- Interviewees argued that additional 'tier two' type accommodation is needed to aid the transition from supported accommodation into independent living. Notably it was claimed that such accommodation must allow young people to return to supported accommodation if there are difficulties.
- Some interviewees argued for the introduction of a drop-in centre for vulnerable young people that offer housing advice at weekends and evenings. It was also suggested that increased funding for people willing to offer supported lodgings to care leavers may address some housing needs for this client group.
- It was argued that whilst new services and accommodation would incur a cost, the long-term savings would make such interventions cost-effective.

Introduction

- 3.5.1 This chapter explores the provision of support for vulnerable young people in their own tenancies. The chapter begins by identifying good practice, before identifying the key challenges. The chapter then explores who is affected by a lack of support; the consequences of a lack of support and possible solutions. The final subsection considers some of the barriers to improved support for independent living.

Good practice

- 3.5.2 Interviews with young people revealed many examples of support that they believe helped them to maintain their tenancies. Firstly, where effective emotional and mental health support was available, young people felt they were likely to maintain their tenancies.

"CCYP – the mentoring service. I had a good mentor and she helped and supported me a lot." YP, 22-25, Torfaen

"Hafan Cymru – there was always someone to talk to." YP, 22-25, Torfaen

"CPN nurse as she helped me with my depression." YP, 18-21, Torfaen

- 3.5.3 The provision of debt advice was also deemed to be important by young people. Interventions reportedly might include support with money management or advice on accessing benefit payments. One young person also felt that their success in maintaining a tenancy was the result of effective support with substance misuse issues.

“My social worker helped me with housing debts because I had one mentor who was meant to give something to housing and they never and my benefits got stopped and I didn’t even know about it.” Female, 20, Torfaen

“It’s a case of organising, I almost lost my house. I’m paying my rent now and am back on track. It’s hard for young people to pay rent” Female, 22-25, Cwmbran

“During probation I have been doing a couple of different services like drug aid which is really good as every time you go there they are drilling into you that drugs are really bad.” YP, 22-25, Torfaen

- 3.5.4 Notably, many young people stated that support from Social Services and TYPSS had been important.

The challenges

- 3.5.5 Despite the apparent good practice, one of the strongest themes to emerge during the research was a lack of practical support for vulnerable young people once they have obtained their own tenancy. Analysis showed that 78% of local service providers believe that there is not enough support for YP when they leave home. Concerns were raised by stakeholders and young people that there is a need for more practical support in order for them to manage their tenancies and remain in their home.

“I think there is a floating support scheme which is quite useful but it only affords approximately an hour a week and that might help a young person sort out difficulties with Housing Benefit, electricity, gas things like that but certainly not enough time to provide any sort of in depth support.” TYPSS Worker

“Finances are probably the biggest [issue], what to do, how to clean, which bleaches to use, how to use the washing machine, budgeting is huge, it’s all that that people don’t realise you need to know and paying bills.” YP, Male, 18-21

- 3.5.6 This lack of support is critical because vulnerable YP often need more support than their non-vulnerable peers when they move into independent living. Interviews with YP revealed that they are often required to undertake additional responsibilities (e.g. form-filling) and they do this with limited or no family support.

“Young people are expected to, at 16, be fully functional... filling forms in and things like that.” Torfaen YOT Team Member

“With no education and no family support it’s so difficult even for an adult let alone a sixteen year old.” Torfaen Housing Worker

- 3.5.7 Torfaen does have some floating support but some YP claimed that information on these, and other, services is not disseminated sufficiently.

*“The amount of information you get about starting a new life on your own is more or less s**t. Because I was asked to live on my own and I didn’t know where to go, how to sign on, where the job centre is and how to shop and clean – stupid things like that. They need more information on these issues to help people sort themselves out.”* YP, Torfaen

- 3.5.8 Hales House homeless hostel for YP teaches young residents independent living skills in order for them to eventually live independently. However, some stakeholders were concerned that young people are exiting very effective 24-hour supported accommodation to take up their own tenancy with only one hour of support per week.

“The YP go from 24 hour support here to 1 hour a week if they’re lucky when they leave [the hostel]”. Torfaen Registered Social Landlord

Who is affected?

- 3.5.9 All vulnerable YP are likely to be affected by a lack of support to live independently. However, the study revealed that some groups of vulnerable YP are most likely to be affected. The evidence suggests that access to support may be influenced by tenure. One stakeholder noted that vulnerable YP in the private rented sector might be less able to access the necessary support.

“With a private rent you are not going to get any [support] really, unless you are referred to a support worker or are referred for support. In a Bron Afon Tenancy, they are pretty good with assisting people to set up utilities and things like that.” Torfaen Housing Worker

- 3.5.10 It also emerged that service providers may be able to offer care leavers some additional support; hence those not leaving care face additional vulnerabilities.

“With the care leavers there is support available for them... we are able to spend much more time with a care leaver.” TYPSS worker

The consequences

- 3.5.11 The need for practical support is a pertinent issue due to the potential consequences to the vulnerable YP if they do not receive the necessary support. Firstly, there is concern that they may accrue rent arrears or face management difficulties. Secondly, if the YP do accrue arrears and ultimately lose their tenancies, they will potentially have fewer housing and support options.

“They [the YP] get into difficulty with their rent and also management issues and possibly if they don’t end up being evicted they at least go through the process, the review process. If they had the right support it wouldn’t have to get that far. There’s no prevention to it at all.” Torfaen Registered Social Landlord

“What happens then the accommodation often breaks down, the person is made intentionally homeless then there’s no support after that.” Youth Offending Team Worker

Exploring solutions

- 3.5.12 It is important to explore possible solutions to the apparent need for additional support for vulnerable YP to manage and maintain their tenancies. The vulnerable YP of Torfaen are not a homogenous group and their knowledge and ability to manage independently is likely to vary. Therefore, additional support could take numerous forms.
- 3.5.13 Some service providers and YP suggested that additional support should be in the form of ‘half-way’ houses or taster ‘cluster’ accommodation where vulnerable YP can test and develop their living skills in a supportive environment with trained staff available if necessary. Significantly, one young person also talked about the importance of being able to return if there are difficulties with the tenancy. The need to provide for failures in vulnerable YP’s tenancies is apparent.

“Expanding more or less what we’re already doing- supported housing into clustered accommodation. If YP are looking to access housing, then possibly looking at a semi-supported place because it’s very difficult for a young person to go from home into their own tenancy so maybe if they could provide like a semi supported accommodation for young people in order to prepare them for their own tenancy and independent accommodation that would be a good idea.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“There needs to be more ‘cluster’ accommodation that you move onto after the hostel and there needs to be more options to move back to more supported places if you aren’t doing well in your own place. There also needs to be more 1 bed flats to move into, with support and stuff.” YP, Male, Cwmbran, 19

- 3.5.14 One way in which supported housing is being implemented for care leavers in Torfaen is via supported lodgings. However, one provider of supported lodgings commented that financial barriers deter others from doing the same.

“A lot of the foster carers wouldn’t take on a foster child in supported lodgings because the money drops from what they get paid as a foster carer to the allowance of supported lodgings. There’s a need for it not just for the fact the children in the system but in general for young people that are living with their parents that want to take that step to independence. There’s quite a need for supported lodgings services” Torfaen Foster Carer

- 3.5.15 One way to overcome this barrier and to promote an increase in supported housing options would be to raise the financial incentive given to foster carers to provide supported lodgings to vulnerable YP. The rationale being that this preventative work would save the Local Authority money in the long-term by reducing the number of failed tenancies and subsequent homelessness and support costs.

- 3.5.16 The idea of supported housing may be even more pertinent for those with specialised needs such as physical disabilities, mental health problems or substance abuse. These vulnerable YP may not be suited to living in a larger 20-bed hostel such as Hales House.

“We don’t have enough supported housing in Torfaen especially for people with specific needs as well as generic needs.” Torfaen Housing Worker

- 3.5.17 Torfaen has made recent progress with regard to providing more supported accommodation in the form of a 4-bed unit for care leavers aged 16+ that is due to open in November/December 2010. However, the general feeling is that there is a need for additional lodgings in order to meet demand. Nevertheless, the 4-bed unit currently under development is a positive addition and highlights the power of joint working with regards to addressing needs and pooling funds to develop innovative projects.

“It’s been really useful because everyone’s worked together - social care, supporting people and housing have all pulled together which means we can put in the money to really develop a good project. But four units isn’t really enough.” Torfaen Housing Worker

- 3.5.18 Whilst an argument for supported lodgings was presented above, there is also the requirement for less intense additional practical support. As noted previously, it is imperative to assess each vulnerable YP in terms of their knowledge and ability to set up and maintain their own tenancies. Some service providers suggested that support could be implemented via additional hours from a support worker visiting and assisting the YP in their homes. As well as providing practical support, this assistance may provide emotional support which could foster a sense of independence and responsibility in the YP

“That would look like a support worker that’s able to go in there and spend two or three days with the young people helping them.” TYPSS worker

- 3.5.19 Other service providers suggested that additional support could come via the provision of a ‘drop-in’ centre where vulnerable YP could go for practical advice and support. The recommendation is that the drop-in centre could be open during the evenings or weekends in order to provide provision when traditional support services are closed.

“A lot of these kids face their problems in the evenings and on weekends and there isn’t a drop in centre for that sort of thing staffed by world-wise people if you like.” Foster Carer

- 3.5.20 This sentiment was echoed in the results of the stakeholder self-completion questionnaires. When asked whether they agree with the statement “our service is accessible at times and on days when young people need it”, only 49% of local service providers agreed or strongly agreed that their service is accessible. The YOT disagreed with this statement more than average, whereas the respondents from voluntary organisations or specific project workers rated this statement higher than average.

- 3.5.21 Finally, a proportion of young people, who had managed to maintain their tenancies, claimed that it was not support that led to their success, it was their own individual actions and their ability to take responsibility.

“[You have to] be aware of noise with neighbours.” Male, 19, Cwmbran

“Because I haven’t done anything wrong. It’s not like I’m having house parties and getting complaints all the time.” Female, 21, Torfaen

Barriers to solutions

- 3.5.22 Despite these proposed solutions to address the lack of independent living support for vulnerable YP, a number of barriers exist to being able to implement them. The immediate and most obvious barrier to providing additional practical living support to vulnerable YP is financial restraints. However, despite the extra expense of implementing more intensive support provision, this support could prevent some vulnerable YP losing their tenancies. This preventative agenda is already being realised in the county borough.

“There are always resource barriers, that will always be the case, but we’ve been quite judicious in the way we’ve moved our services away from reactive to more preventative.” Torfaen Housing Worker

- 3.5.23 The costs of providing the additional support would be recouped via the prevention of the homelessness procedure and the additional support that would be required in the long-term. This preventative work could also mean that vulnerable YP avoid getting into a situation where their options of support are severely reduced following the loss of their tenancy. The evidence suggests that setting an ill-equipped YP up in their own tenancies, when they lack practical life skills, or when there is inadequate support available, is akin to setting up the vulnerable YP to fail.

“People think prevention is all about preventing that first case of homelessness. It is, but prevention is also about preventing that second or third application. We’ve seen people present 10 times, it’s not uncommon for people to recur as homeless – you need to deal with that. What support do they need to stop that happening again.”
Torfaen Housing Worker

3.6 Education, training and employment

KEY FINDINGS

- It is widely recognised that a lack of formal education and training and a lack of employment will significantly impact on the ability of a young person to find independent accommodation. This provides the context for this chapter.
- There are good education and training opportunities in Torfaen that are not always promoted sufficiently to vulnerable young people.
- Reportedly, some young people do not effectively engage with the education and training courses available due to a lack of motivation. In addition some young people find the learning environments uncomfortable.
- There appear to be financial barriers to some young taking up education and training opportunities as it affects their benefit claims. However, this may not be an issue in the future in light of recent UK Government proposals.
- Young people aged 18 and older appear to face some difficulties in accessing training and education, which appear to be focussed on those aged 16-17 years. In addition, those living in the north of the borough reportedly face longer journeys to access education and training.
- Despite a reported lack of employment opportunities, there is evidence that local service providers are helping young people to find employment.
- There is concern about poor school attendance amongst some vulnerable young people and this is likely to have consequences for future housing pathways. Local service providers have recognised and begun to prioritise this issue.

3.6.1 The research team asked both service providers and YP what they thought the education, training and employment opportunities were like for vulnerable YP in Torfaen. Education and training are inextricably linked to future job prospects. Additionally, paid employment is a key part of enabling young people to access and maintain accommodation and lead full independent lives. Indeed, many YP stated that lack of finances was a major challenge for them obtaining their own accommodation in Torfaen.

“People don’t have enough money. People can’t afford houses. Young people don’t have a lot of money.” YP, Male, 22

“Ain’t got no money to get my own place. If you haven’t got money you can’t have your own place.” YP, Male, 17

Education & Training: opportunities and issues

3.6.2 According to the official labour market statistics (2009), Torfaen has higher rates of residents without qualifications than Wales-wide and UK averages (17%, 14.8% and 12.3% respectively). Overall, the perception was that training and education opportunities for vulnerable YP were good in the county borough and various service providers work with vulnerable YP to support and help them to undertake education and training.

“Education is really good here and there’s a college.” YP, female, 21

“The TYPSS team work with getting young people into training places. Plus we’ve taken on a few care leavers into employment. Torfaen Training are also very much involved in trying to get young people into some sort of educational training.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“Hales House has a very good relationship with Bron Afon and they get the young people into training schemes. Bron Afon have been really supportive.” Torfaen Housing Worker

3.6.3 Despite good provision, there is some concern that opportunities are insufficiently advertised amongst YP.

“Obviously there are going to be some people who don’t access it, or who are not aware of the opportunities that exist.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“There is some careers stuff around here. I don’t know what though.” YP, Male, 17

3.6.4 As well as advertising training and education opportunities, the challenge exists to engage YP in the schemes and maintain motivation.

“The workers they do their very best it’s often very difficult to stimulate a young person to those activities. Their priorities are elsewhere.” Torfaen Service Provider

3.6.5 Additionally, one YP noted that because they do not like big groups, they feel they are missing out on some training opportunities.

“If you don’t like big groups, then it’s not good. Me and my mate don’t like big groups but that’s how all the employment and training stuff is run. So if you don’t like groups and stuff you miss out. There should be more one on one information and help.” YP, Female, 19, Cwmbran

3.6.6 During the research there was evidence that further opportunities are developing for care leavers with regards to training and employment opportunities in the county borough.

“They’re [the training and education opportunities] are quite good here, certainly for care leavers. We have a scheme contract with the big lottery to provide support, education and training opportunities for young people for up to four years and the contract enables us to pay a £50.00 a week top-up in the first year to the training allowance and that makes it a bit more attractive to the young person because a lot of them struggle with the concept of working for 37 hours for £50.00. And we’ve got a specialist education worker working just with the care leavers now and also a specialist employment training manager and they’re employed for the next four years.” TYPSS Worker

3.6.7 While this additional provision will benefit care leavers, there is also provision available for those who did not come via the care system.

“Those ones who are not in the care system, or NEET if you like, we have pre-vocational stuff here to build them up to either further education or work based training.” TYPSS Worker

3.6.8 One theme that arose during the research was the financial difficulties that YP face if they take up training opportunities. Although the training could lead to improved long-term prospects, the lack of financial incentive – or the fact that the YP would be financially worse off if they were to attend the training – means that training is not a viable option for some local YP. This issue is especially pertinent to those YP who will not qualify for the new education and training initiative for care leavers.

“I hate the training allowance I think it is a disadvantage to young people. I think training allowance is about £55. The problem is, if you do the training you lose the first £5 of travel so that reduces you to £50, also it is classed as earnings for housing benefit so what happens is housing benefit look at how much they are getting and they actually end up with less than someone who is sat on their backside getting Job Seekers Allowance.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“One young lad said he wanted to work on a training placement with us and the support worker said hang on a minute you’re gonna lose a pound a week if you go on the training. It’s crazy that by doing training they then lose £1.00 per week. It’s not much incentive. It’s a lot when you’re only on £51.00 but at the end of the day if they get a full time job out of it surely it’s a good thing.” Registered Social Landlord

- 3.6.9 Despite this emerging as a major issue, local service providers feel powerless to change this, and it is viewed as a problem outside of their control.

“Obviously I can see that the reasons for a move towards gainful employment or meaningful education are designed towards a more sustainable population. But to provide services locally, for example within Torfaen, we would need to have the support of not just the assembly government but also the national government and we are all looking at cutbacks so I don’t know what success we are going to have.” Torfaen Project Worker

- 3.6.10 Another barrier to vulnerable YP accessing education and training is the lack of opportunities due to funding once the YP reach 18.

“They [the opportunities] are alright, although there should be more help for people in education and training after the age of 18.” Male, 19, Cwmbran

“With our care leavers they are coming out of school, no qualifications a lot of them, and they are about 3 years behind everyone else with their education. So at 19, they are just ready to go on to further education but at 19 there is no financial support. At 19 if they are in their own accommodation and they want to do further education, the only thing they can access at the moment is the Welsh Assembly Learning Grant of £1,500. There is nothing else out there. All their benefits will stop, all their JSA will stop, everything. So they have got to live on £1,500, impossible, so they could lose their flat.” TYPSS Worker

- 3.6.11 Thus some vulnerable YP, who may have been disadvantaged from unstable or chaotic backgrounds and a lack of school attendance, are unable to access education and training when they are in a position to do so. As noted, education and/or training leads to improved future job prospects, so without these opportunities, the vulnerable YP may become caught in a perpetual cycle of disadvantage which leaves them effectively trapped in a lifestyle of living on benefits. Without the additional support and removal of financial barriers to training and education, many vulnerable YP’s opportunities to obtain gainful employment are greatly reduced.

- 3.6.12 As well as training and employment substantially improving the YP’s job prospects, it also opens up a new social circle that can offer the vulnerable YP additional support, help to build personal confidence and develop and produce well-rounded individuals who can contribute to society and lead meaningful lives. In the short-term it also means that vulnerable YP are occupied which means there is less chance of the YP getting into trouble through boredom or inactivity.

“We need more places like the CCYP ... there needs to be more for young people to do. It keeps them busy with things.” YP, Torfaen

- 3.6.13 A further barrier to YP accessing training and education is location of the opportunities across the borough. Thus there will be financial implications for YP in the north who wish to attend education or training opportunities in the south.

"The children in the north of the borough are very disadvantaged in that sense, there is no sixth form in the north of the borough, they are all in the south." Torfaen Project Worker

Employment: opportunities and issues

- 3.6.14 When speaking to service providers, there were mixed perspectives regarding the job opportunities available in Torfaen for vulnerable YP. Many YP felt that there were not enough job opportunities and that the situation has worsened over recent years.

"There's not enough people to give YP jobs and there's not enough jobs and some YP don't have qualifications to get a job." YP, Male, 19

- 3.6.15 According to the official labour market statistics (2009-2010) Torfaen has higher rates of economic activity compared to the rest of Wales (30.3% compared to 27.3% respectively) and higher numbers of 18-24 year olds claiming job seekers allowance compared to the rest of Wales (37.3% and 34% respectively). Despite the apparent lack of availability, there is evidence that local service providers are helping YP to get jobs.

"I got my job through TYPSS." YP, Female, 25

- 3.6.16 The final theme raised with regard to education, training and employment opportunities in Torfaen was concern for the lack of provision for YP not in employment, education or training (NEETs). However, some service providers highlighted that there is some provision for young people who are NEET.

"I'm actually appalled at the lack of provision for young people when they're excluded from school. There's so many where young people just aren't in education and they're left to roam the street." Youth Offending Team Worker

"We do provide education service for the NEETS but the heavy end NEETS, we determine those likely to be claiming benefits for the next 7 or 8 years if something doesn't happen now, they're young people without basic skills and without these skills they would require to be able to hold down a job. We've got an education worker that works full time that is available to them and she at the moment can work with up to 40 in a year and that's the total target group that we've got that fall in that category." TYPSS Worker

3.7 Joint working

KEY FINDINGS

- There is evidence of widespread effective joined up working in Torfaen. For example TYPSS brings numerous organisations together in one location and the organisations share many joint procedures.
- Reportedly, service providers could benefit from closer working to allow policies and practices to align across departments, to avoid duplication of services and to identify gaps in current provision.
- Several barriers were identified to achieving more effective joint working: different service agendas, the time required to forge relationships between organisations, different definitions of young people, and difficulties with information sharing.
- Some interviewees recommended that additional services could have a presence at TYPSS, such as: a substance misuse service, a GP and a housing advisor. This would reportedly improve joint working. A further improvement identified by stakeholders was for better communication and sharing of practice between TYPSS and the CCYP.

Good practice

- 3.7.1 The Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales (2009) calls for effective, well-developed joint working involving statutory and third sector organisations in a range of sectors such as youth, education, health and social care. The current economic climate and impending public sector spending cuts make it even more important to develop more effective and joined up preventative services. The current research unearthed evidence of effective and increasing joint working between services in order to deliver the best housing and support to vulnerable YP in Torfaen. For example, the relationship between Housing and Social Services departments is perceived to have improved since TYPSS started up and since Housing decided not to investigate intentionality in homeless 16/17 year olds.

“We have a lot of contact with the 16+ team who are part of the TYPPS project in Cwmbran that is our best gateway.” Torfaen Housing Worker

- 3.7.2 We asked service providers whether they agree with the statement “we actively work with other local agencies and services to meet the needs of local young people”. The average score for this item was 4.53 (SD= 0.72) out of 5 (the higher the score indicates the more agreement with the statement). Thus service providers agree that they work with others locally to meet vulnerable young people’s needs. Further analysis showed that 93% of respondents agree that they actively work with other local agencies to deliver effective services to vulnerable YP.

- 3.7.3 Examples of good practice with regard to joint-working in Torfaen are: TYPSS, H2H project, The Doorway and the 4-bed care leavers unit⁸. Furthermore, young people frequently commented on the value of being able to access different types of support, often in one location.

“It’s all been good – CCYP has helped with my confidence. Social Service have helped me get my head straight and finance are helping me with my money.” YP, 22-25, Torfaen

⁸ Please see the ‘service map’ in the Literature Review section of this report for details on each of these services

"TYPSS is great – there is nothing that TYPSS doesn't do." YP, 18-21, Torfaen

The challenges

- 3.7.4 Despite evidence of effective joint working across departments, it is clear that sectors could benefit from closer working and developing a deeper understanding of other services. This understanding of the policies and procedures of other departments will allow the assessment of whether policies and procedures align across service areas.

"Course that's one of the things that is lacked is the knowledge of each other's services. We don't know a lot about social services what their legislation is how they're supposed to govern how they deal with young people and vice versa. They are very unaware of how we conduct investigations how it's worked out and general housing legislation so they can't give advice on housing similarly we can't give advice about social services like that could be improved." Torfaen Housing Worker

"I think we need to link up more with people like the benefits agency, there are maybe one or two that will listen in there but they really do not understand the issues of these young people on the streets, they don't." TYPSS Worker

- 3.7.5 However, there are barriers to aligning the policies across departments due to the differing agendas of each service.

"I would say social services is more tolerant more understanding of young people as they are coming to it from a different approach and then possibly we're more in line with youth offending team because we work to legislation and we work to things like that and obviously social services work to legislation but they can better meet the needs of young people because they're geared towards that because they're geared to keeping them engaged and accessing services whereas we're will you do this and you get this and if you don't you get evicted. Social services have got the luxury of being able to support people regardless of their behaviour really they stay engaged with them and they stay supporting them whereas we don't do that." Torfaen Housing Worker

"Sometimes social care re-house somebody and when that young person becomes a problem it's very difficult for us to take any action... you have to think about the rest of the community. [Our relationship with social services] is better than they were but still not as good as with other agencies." Registered Social landlord

"I think it's very difficult and for them [policies] to align up because of the statutory nature because of the risk to the public and I think the difference in the legislation." YOT Worker

- 3.7.6 Following clarification of the law following the Southwark judgement in 2009 (see chapter 3), it is even more important for different services to work together for two reasons (1) to develop clear protocols regarding how homeless 16-17 year olds are accommodated and supported and (2) because of the extra workload on social services, resources (in terms of staff time) will be further reduced. There is evidence that effective joined up working is already happening with regard to this.

"With the Southwark ruling it's changed how social services have to deal with 16 and 17 year olds but it's good that we haven't necessarily changed our approach... we haven't just set up social services, we just carry on - so although legislation will change it's still very much joint working." Torfaen Housing Worker

"I think that there is sometimes the perception that it is the job only of social services to do some of this whereas in fact actually it is across the piece and across different agencies. I think there is a tendency to say that it is an

issue for social services when I think that really it could be an issue for the council as a whole and other agencies.” Torfaen Housing Worker

- 3.7.7 Another barrier to joint working is the time it takes to forge relationships across service areas when staff are already under pressure to complete large workloads in their own departments. This situation is made more difficult when departments are undergoing structural changes or when there is a high staff turnover.

“Structural changes in organisations and the different drivers on them can mean that it difficult for joined up working and I think it then becomes quite dependent on quite professional working relationships between people and so things can work despite organisational change.” Torfaen Housing Worker

- 3.7.8 A third barrier to joined up working is the different age definitions of a YP in Torfaen. This can lead to problems such as uneven delivery of services, a less smooth transition from children’s to adult services and duplication of services.

“If you look at the youth service, they would see a young person up to the age of 25, the youth offending team see a young person until they are 18... So because everyone sees a young person at a different age, we here see a young person as anyone under the age of 18, anyone over 18 is an adult... I think that is why it doesn’t work. Because we are looking at young people at different ages, what is young person in one is an adult in another and I think that is why we don’t match.” Torfaen Project Worker

“But I think that if we are looking and talking about the development of a young people’s service, one of the things is what age should it go up to and how is that transition going to be made. I think it is very difficult if you commission services from 18 onwards and you commission a young people’s service that works for up to age 25, are you duplicating what is in the adult services for 6 or 7 years, there are issues around that.” Torfaen Project Worker

- 3.7.9 A further barrier to effective joint working is reportedly local information sharing protocols.

“Again that is a barrier... the information sharing and that sort of stuff. There is probably a lot more as well. It is what to share and what not to share. I think everyone pussy foots around that, people are terrified of letting out a bit of information that maybe we shouldn’t of told that person there because their agency hadn’t signed up to our information sharing protocol. If the relationship between the actual workers on the ground, is good and they know each other, then they will talk, if someone leaves and someone else comes in then it could stop because it is very much built on a relationship and it shouldn’t be, it should be on the basis of agency protocol of trying to work together to try and support someone.” Project Worker

“We are not always very good of sharing information that perhaps social care gets or housing gets or education gets, and then actually pooling it in terms of how we take things forward like a career plan for a young person. I think we could do that better.” Torfaen Housing Worker

Solutions

- 3.7.10 Some service providers spoke of the need to map accurately what work is being done in Torfaen, with who and from what age in order to assess overlap in provision and improve joined up working.

“I’m sure there are agencies working in Torfaen that I know very little about and as a result of that there will be issues about duplication and all sorts of other things. So in order to improve it first and foremost we need to map out who’s out there what work are they doing that kind of has some parallels with what others are doing what overlaps there are. Once that piece of work’s done then there’ll be a clearer easier way to see where there can

be more joint working done. We can see where agencies are working and perhaps no longer need to be working.” TYPSS Worker

- 3.7.11 Some service providers suggested an information sharing protocol that followed a shared single assessment principle. This sharing of information could prove time-efficient for workers allowing them to spend more time with the vulnerable YP they support.

“I believe we would improve the services if it was a kind of shared assessment pool and shared database because there’s a lot of duplication which ties into finances. As good as it is because of the open dialogue that workers can have with other professionals and agencies across the team it would be nice to have all that information captured on one system. We carry out a joint assessment with the homelessness officer they do their assessment and it sits on their database whereas that could just very easily go on to our database. I think some consideration needs to be given to a shared assessment tool or a shared database with all the information on there... that would improve the quality of the service and the response time.” TYPSS Worker

- 3.7.12 Evidence gathered from service providers during interviews has unearthed some ideas for additional services that could benefit the vulnerable YP of Torfaen. Many people thought these could be achieved by further joint working and integrating additional services to TYPSS.

“The only thing really that would make things better for young people is for Torfaen to have a commissioned young person’s substance misuse service.” Project Worker

“I think what TYPSS need is perhaps a housing adviser somebody there who give general housing advice on a day to day basis.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“Possibly to have a GP here once a quarter because I know some of our young people don’t like to go in and make an appointment same with dental practice really if we could get that sort of surgery in here maybe once a quarter for them I think that would be an advantage and legal advice as well with the police maybe they need to have a police officer or solicitor here if they got any queries they could go down that route just have the access to them.” TYPSS Worker

- 3.7.13 Other services that stakeholders believe could link in better with TYPSS are Cwmbran Centre for Young People and the Youth Service. This would reportedly lead to the reduction in the risk of duplication of provision as all services would be operated from the same office. Additionally, TYPSS operate an information sharing protocol thus data could be shared between services more easily.

“We don’t need to recreate the wheel because it’s already there. Things are made complicated and actually it’s a thing of simplicity.” TYPSS Worker

3.8 County-wide provision

KEY FINDINGS

- There are concerns that some parts of the county borough are better served with regard to support services than others. For example, one interviewee claimed that young people are unable to 'sign on' for welfare benefits in the north of the county. There are concerns that some young people in the north must pay additional travel costs in order to access services in the south of the county.
- Concerns were raised about housing vulnerable YP in parts of the county borough that are significant distances from their previous or preferred place of residence. It was suggested that placement in inappropriate locations may have detrimental effects such as; isolation from existing networks, poor behavioural responses, and financial costs of travelling to see friends and family.

3.8.1 Many service providers stated that housing and support provision vary across the county borough of Torfaen. It is clear that progress has been made in terms of ensuring that services for vulnerable YP are widespread across the county borough, however more is required to ensure that services are delivered consistently throughout Torfaen.

3.8.2 'The Doorway' is a new youth project operating in Blaenavon. It is seen as a "mini-TYPSS" with all agencies, apart from housing, represented there. A representative stated that all YP presenting at The Doorway as homeless get an automatic appointment at TYPSS and are given the cost of a return bus ticket. Furthermore, the council's Customer Care Centres operate in Cwmbran, Pontypool and Blaenavon and take referrals from all homeless YP. Thus there are evident considerations toward serving vulnerable YP throughout the county. As the quote below demonstrates, The Doorway project is beginning to deal with issues of homelessness in the north of the county borough:

"The Doorway is a drop-in centre and certainly the initial observations and assessments of that is there's a lot going on for young people in that area perhaps until now has gone unnoticed because they deal with it as a community so there's a lot of homelessness that goes unnoticed because they're being provided shelter initially by family members and then neighbours and so on and so forth and it goes on." TYPSS Worker

3.8.3 Although interventions such as the Doorway project are making progress in combating homelessness and hidden homelessness, many service providers and YP feel that some areas of Torfaen are better served, in terms of housing related support, than others.

"The distance – they always stick you far away. They need to put you closer to where you know TYPSS and the council are." Male, Torfaen, 21

"It's easy for those young people who are living in the South of the borough. - It's fantastic- but I don't think its very well for those living in the North [...] you can't even sign on in Blaenafon." TYPSS Worker

3.8.4 One of the problems that could arise from having a concentration of services in one area of Torfaen is the financial impact on vulnerable YP who have to travel to access services:

"Money for transport is an issue." Youth Offending Team Worker

“I think there’s this perception amongst professionals of “well it’s just up the road”, but it’s not if you haven’t got a car and a lot of money in terms of public transport.” Youth Offending Team Worker

3.8.5 Other concerns raised during the research regard the placement of vulnerable YP into housing in locations other than where they are originally from.

“When someone presents as homeless having the only accommodation available in the borough in the north end it penalises people who are from the south end of the borough because straight away they’re isolated from maintaining school or college or training. It is a roof over their head but they haven’t got the finances to get back and for so family ties that could be maintained are lost or put at risk.” Hales House Worker

“We do need to consider that when we’re providing support to young people - and that becomes more apparent when they look into accommodation- because north of the borough like to remain north of the borough and the same for the south. Unfortunately, the available accommodation is not always as clear cut as that so we may have somebody in Cwmbran having to consider somewhere in the North of the borough.” TYPSS Worker

3.8.6 Additionally, the evidence suggests that placing vulnerable YP in areas away from where they are comfortable could have detrimental affects on the individual, leading to behaviour that jeopardises their tenancies. Placing vulnerable YP away from any existing family or friend support networks could lead to feelings of isolation that results in the YP inviting people into their homes for company. The geographical isolation is compounded by the perceptions of a different ‘culture’ in various communities within Torfaen. Blaenavon is viewed as quite a rural location, whereas Cwmbran and Pontypool are viewed as being more ‘town-like’ in their composition. A consequence of YP being placed in areas that they are not familiar with is they are then forced to travel to see friends and family resulting in additional financial strains that could put their tenancy in jeopardy.

“Although it’s the same local authority it’s not the area that they’re from it’s two very definite different cultures, lifestyles so they’re basically being taken out of where they’re are comfortable.” TYPSS Worker

“It’s no good putting somebody in an area where they’ve got no family support, or no knowledge of the area... they’re just going to be out there on their own and start taking in people [to their home]. Just by being in the wrong area can be a main issue for them in losing the tenancy.” Young Person Project Worker

“The biggest challenge is the loneliness and the isolation many young people fail to appreciate what that’s going to be like and then the consequential problems that arise from that inviting all and sundry back just to have company and ends up with certain undesirables friends causing havoc for the neighbours and putting pressure on the tenancy.” TYPSS Worker

3.8.7 The issue of living within the borough but in an area they were not familiar with was also apparent in the YP interviews.

“The main challenges for young people is most of them want to move to Cwmbran but it’s much harder in Cwmbran than it is in Pontypool because there isn’t enough properties in Cwmbran because everyone wants to stay in their comfort zone.” Male, Torfaen

3.9 Communicating with vulnerable young people

KEY FINDINGS

- Torfaen Young People Support Service (TYPSS) and Cwmbran Centre for Young People (CCYP) were seen as examples of good practice when it comes to both communicating with vulnerable YP and creating a YP-friendly environment.
- YP often feel like they are not being listened to by service providers and that they have no choice in what happens to them. Moreover, some feel that official buildings are not young-person friendly so they feel intimidated in these spaces.
- Some service providers call for more widespread training for all staff working with vulnerable YP.

Good practice

- 3.9.1 The stakeholder self-completion questionnaire revealed that 71% of respondents believe the environment in which they work is YP friendly, whereas only 9% (7 people) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This view is shared by some young people, who particularly identify TYPSS and CCYP as good examples of how services should work and communicate with young people.

“The people at TYPSS are really friendly and easy to get along with.” YP, 21-25, Torfaen

“The people support you at CCYP.” YP, 16-17, Torfaen

The challenge

- 3.9.2 Whilst there are some positive perspectives on the nature of services provided to young people in Torfaen, when asked what was bad about Torfaen’s support services, the main theme raised by YP was that they often do feel like they are not listened to and they do not have a choice in what happens to them.

“They don’t discuss it with you – they just tell you to do it. Let us have our say.” YP, 18-21, Torfaen

“Young people will go in and they’re trying to explain but I don’t think they’re listened to maybe young people don’t know how to put their point across and they’re kind of fobbed off and they accept that and just feel very unhappy very disillusioned with the service and what will happen then of course is they won’t stay where they’re supposed to be so then they’ll go into that cycle of losing that placement.” Youth Offending Team Worker

- 3.9.3 Many YP interviewed stated that they need more help to understand policies and procedures and what is to happen to them. They want service providers to explain things to them fully in a language they understand. They also want official buildings to be more YP friendly. These feelings of not being listened to and not understanding what they are told, coupled with feelings that official buildings are not YP friendly, can lead to many vulnerable YP feeling too intimidated to go into service provider buildings.

“A lot of people don’t trust them (housing) - when they explain it to you and you don’t understand they ignore it and carry on – it’s terrible.” YP, 18-21, Torfaen

“Some of the buildings aren’t very friendly and the language some people use.” YP, Torfaen

“Places like county hall need to be more young-person friendly.” YP, 18-21, Torfaen

- 3.9.4 Confidence in dealing with service providers was cited as a main reason why it’s easier for some YP to get housing and related support in Torfaen. This lack of confidence, coupled with the perception that they may not be listened to and feeling intimidated by the offices means that some vulnerable YP are not presenting to the council when they find themselves in housing need.

“I went to TYPSS and then they took me to the housing department. They did most of the talking and I just sat there. TYPSS argued my case. It’s easier for some as if someone has loads of confidence they can go in there and say what they want and some just sit back and let them do what they want.” YP, Female, 20

“I stayed on the streets for a while and my mum said I can’t do that anymore so she found me a support worker and they offered me a priority card which took me 2 years to get but in the meantime I was getting worse on the streets drinking and smoking drugs. I don’t think they’d have listened to me so much if my mum hadn’t dragged me in there. It didn’t really seem like they cared. Mum argued my case. It’s easier for some as some people don’t have the confidence to stand up and say what they mean and speak their mind I think this is really important.” Male, YP, 21

“It’s easier for some [people] as some young people don’t have the confidence to the council and say “I’m homeless” they’d rather go from mate to mate.” YP, Torfaen

Exploring solutions

- 3.9.5 Analysis of the self-completion questionnaires with service providers indicated that when asked their opinion the statement “our staff are skilled in working with YP,” many providers agreed. The average score for this item was 4.25 (SD = 0.91) out of 5 (the higher the score on this item the more the service providers agreed with this statement). Thus service providers believe that their staff are skilled in working with young people. Further analysis showed that 78% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their staff are skilled at working with young people.
- 3.9.6 Nevertheless, some service providers believe there needs to be more training provided for staff who work with YP, although there is evidence that consideration is being given to this matter in Torfaen. Fully qualified staff will be able to effectively engage and encourage YP and help to build their confidence.

“I don’t think that some of our partners that we are working with are particularly effective with working with young people it has been a pattern that has perhaps been okay for people who are now in their fifties but not for younger people.” Torfaen Housing Worker

“The other thing and also being able to choose the gender of who supported them [the YP] and that again has been quite difficult because we initially attracted much more females. The sector attracts more females and it’s very difficult to attract males. We’ve changed the job titles and now we attract some men and some younger men as well so much more.” Torfaen Project Worker

Section 4

Towards a comprehensive and improved system of services

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 This final chapter of the report summarises and reflects upon the research findings in order to make recommendations for a comprehensive and improved system of services for addressing the housing, social care and support needs of vulnerable young people in Torfaen. The chapter is divided into four sections: i] a summary of the key findings; ii] recommendations for an improved system of services; iii] a diagram illustrating the proposed system of services; and iv] brief concluding remarks.

4.2 Summary of key findings

The UK political and socio-economic context

- 4.2.1 Recent economic, social and political change has resulted in a lot of uncertainty for service providers. Consequently, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) funded Cardiff University to consider what the situation might be like for young people (aged 16-30) in 2020. Whilst the study considers the housing options of all young people, it provides a useful indication of the key challenges likely to influence the housing options of vulnerable young people in Torfaen over the next 10 years.
- 4.2.2 The study finds that the private rented sector is expected to continue to expand in line with current trends and it is likely that increasing numbers of young people will utilise the sector over the next ten years. However, young people in receipt of housing benefit are less likely to be accommodated in the sector.
- 4.2.3 The report indicates that due to reduced investment in new social housing, the supply of non-market housing is unlikely to rise sufficiently to meet future need.
- 4.2.4 The report found that unemployment is likely to remain high amongst young people and will therefore be a key influence on their housing options.
- 4.2.5 Significantly, the report claims that changes to welfare benefits will have a detrimental impact on the housing circumstances of vulnerable young people over the next 10 years and the demand for housing support and advice services is likely to increase.
- 4.2.6 Whilst the report does not identify any projections for the future of Supporting People services, it suggests that cuts are likely to reduce the availability of housing-related support services, unless SP teams and SP Planning Groups can work collaboratively and flexibly to ensure that the reduction in frontline services is managed.

The local policy context

- 4.2.7 The review of key local and national policy documents found that very little priority is given to ensuring young people are able to exert choice and autonomy.
- 4.2.8 Early intervention and prevention are strategic priorities in the Torfaen Supporting People Operational Plan, the Corporate Plan and at national level in the WAG Ten Year Homelessness Plan. The Corporate Plan focuses on improving security and support in the Private Rented Sector in order to prevent homelessness.
- 4.2.9 Joint-working is identified as a clear priority in the Supporting People Operational Plan, the TYPSS Annual Report and the Children and Young People's Plan. It is also a priority at Welsh Assembly Government level.
- 4.2.10 At a local level, the TYPSS Annual report and the Children and Young People's Plan clearly illustrate the priority given to young people friendly services. The WAG also identifies the importance of such services in the Ten Year Homelessness Plan.

Homeless pathways

- 4.2.11 The study identified four broad pathways taken by homeless young people in Torfaen: i] a leaving care pathway; a leaving home (service contact) pathway; iii] a leaving home (no service contact) pathway; and iv] a leaving prison pathway.
- 4.2.12 The *leaving home (service contact) pathway* is characterised by young people who leave home, mostly into sofa surfing, before taking a staged route through temporary accommodation to

independent living. These young people may experience repeat homelessness. Young people tend to attribute their homelessness to individual actions such as poor behaviour. Half of these young people were in education, employment or training and half found that they either had family support throughout or support increased, normally whilst at Hales House.

- 4.2.13 The *leaving care pathway* is characterised by young people leaving state care into a range of different accommodation types, from sofa surfing to independent accommodation. Unlike the leaving home (service contact) pathway, care leavers may make more direct transitions from highly temporary accommodation to independent living. These young people may experience repeat homelessness. Young people tend to attribute their homelessness to individual actions. Most of these young people were not in education, employment or training and very few had family support.
- 4.2.14 The study did not engage with young people in the *leaving home (no service contact) pathway*. However, stakeholders in Torfaen explained that a proportion of young people who leave the family home and become homeless, will perhaps sofa surf but will not continue in the system of support.
- 4.2.15 The study did not identify particular pathways relating to young prison leavers. However, stakeholders in Torfaen explained that a proportion of young people who leave prison will experience homelessness and their pathways are likely to be different in some way. Therefore it is assumed that a leaving prison pathway also exists.

Homelessness prevention

- 4.2.16 Many service providers are undertaking work to prevent housing difficulties, including a focus on preventing homelessness via the Housing Options team, education on independent living skills and mediation work. Notably, support with wider issues such as behavioural problems is perceived by stakeholders to be part of the Torfaen prevention agenda.
- 4.2.17 Despite some good provision by the Llamau EMPHASIS team, there is perceived to be a lack of early education in schools on independent living skills and housing/homelessness advice.
- 4.2.18 It was suggested that further preventative work could be undertaken by introducing a wider Housing Officer role in the TYPSS building and the introduction of a wider Housing Solutions service
- 4.2.19 Despite an effective mediation service provided by Llamau, it was claimed that more needs to be done with younger children aged 14 and 15 years. Moreover, mediation is reportedly used too frequently at the point of crisis, whereas it may be more effective before the young person and their family reach crisis point.

Emergency accommodation

- 4.2.20 Both service providers and young people believe that too frequently, the emergency accommodation (primarily B&B accommodation) provided for homeless young people is inappropriate and of an insufficient standard.
- 4.2.21 Young people have positive perspectives on the temporary accommodation and support provision at Hales House.
- 4.2.22 There are concerns that the supply of temporary accommodation for young people is not sufficient to meet the demands of Torfaen's young homeless population, and aside of the 4 unit YP scheme, there is limited opportunity to develop further supported housing dedicated to YP and their needs.

Housing and related support for particular groups of young people

- 4.2.23 It was widely recognised that care leavers in Torfaen receive very good leaving care support, a service that is reportedly needed due to the many challenges that young care leavers face.

- 4.2.24 There are concerns regarding the lack of housing and related support available to single 18-24 year olds whom the local authority has no duty to accommodate. The Private Rented sector is reportedly very difficult to access due to Shared Room Rates and these young people are unlikely to receive priority for social housing. Moreover, these young people are thought to be at a high risk of being found intentionally homeless which further reduces their housing options. Reportedly, some of these young people now have to move to other local authority areas to meet their housing needs. It was suggested that good relationships must continue between the local authority and registered social landlords in order to find housing solutions for 18-25 year olds.
- 4.2.25 There are concerns that the housing needs of certain populations are not being met, such as: single mothers, those with disabilities and ex-offenders.
- 4.2.26 The need to effectively support and house homeless 16 and 17 year olds was highlighted as an area of particular importance.

Support for vulnerable young people in their own tenancies

- 4.2.27 Young people identified a range of examples of good practice interventions that are effective in supporting young people to maintain their tenancies, these include: emotional and mental health support; debt advice and substance misuse support.
- 4.2.28 Some vulnerable young people are not aware of the support services available to them.
- 4.2.29 Both local service providers and young people believe there needs to be more independent living support for young people in their own tenancies as without such support young people may face difficulties maintaining the tenancy and consequently facing eviction.
- 4.2.30 There is concern that many young people leave Hales House where there is support 24 hour a day and move into accommodation where the levels of support a dramatically reduced.
- 4.2.31 It was claimed that young people living in the Private Rented Sector are less likely to receive any form of independent living support.
- 4.2.32 Interviewees argued that additional 'tier two' type accommodation is needed to aid the transition from supported accommodation into independent living. Notably it was claimed that such accommodation must allow young people to return to supported accommodation if there are difficulties.
- 4.2.33 Some interviewees argued for the introduction of a drop-in centre for vulnerable young people that offers housing advice at weekends and evenings. It was also suggested that increased funding for people willing to offer supported lodgings to care leavers may address some housing needs for this client group.
- 4.2.34 It was argued that whilst new services and accommodation would incur a cost, the long-term savings would make such interventions cost-effective.

Education, training and employment

- 4.2.35 It is widely recognised that a lack of formal education and training and a lack of employment will significantly impact o the ability of a young person to find independent accommodation. This provides the context for this chapter.
- 4.2.36 There are good education and training opportunities in Torfaen that are not always promoted sufficiently to vulnerable young people.

- 4.2.37 Reportedly, some young people do not effectively engage with the education and training courses available due to a lack of motivation. In addition some young people find the learning environments uncomfortable.
- 4.2.38 There appears to be financial barriers to some young taking up education and training opportunities as it affects their benefit claims. However, this may not be an issue in the future in light of recent UK Government proposals.
- 4.2.39 Young people aged 18 and older appear to face some difficulties in accessing training and education, which appear to be focussed on those aged 16-17 years. In addition, those living in the north of the borough reportedly face longer journeys to access education and training.
- 4.2.40 Despite a reported lack of employment opportunities, there is evidence that local service providers are helping young people to find employment.
- 4.2.41 There is concern about poor school attendance amongst some vulnerable young people and this is likely to have consequences for future housing pathways. Local service providers have recognised and begun to prioritise this issue.

Joint-working

- 4.2.42 There is evidence of widespread effective joined-up working in Torfaen. For example TYPSS brings numerous organisations together in one location and the organisations share many joint procedures.
- 4.2.43 In Housing the Common Housing Register enables one point of access to all social housing in Torfaen through a collaborative partnership approach.
- 4.2.44 Reportedly, service providers could benefit from closer working to allow policies and practices to align across departments, to avoid duplication of services and to identify gaps in current provision.
- 4.2.45 Several barriers were identified to achieving more effective joint-working: different service agendas, the time required to forge relationships between organisations, different definitions of young people, and difficulties with information sharing.
- 4.2.46 Some interviewees recommended that additional service could have a presence at TYPSS, such as: a substance misuse service, a GP and increased input from housing advisors. This would reportedly improve joint working. A further improvement identified by stakeholders was for better communication and sharing of practice between TYPSS and the CCYP.

County-wide provision

- 4.2.47 There are concerns that some parts of the county borough are better served with regard to support services than others. For example, one interviewee claimed that young people are unable to 'sign on' for welfare benefits in the north of the county. There are concerns that some young people in the north must pay additional travel costs in order to access services in the south of the county.
- 4.2.48 Concerns were raised about housing vulnerable YP in parts of the county borough that are significant distances from their previous or preferred place of residence. It was suggested that placement in inappropriate locations may have detrimental effects such as: isolation from existing networks, poor behavioural responses, and financial costs of travelling to see friends and family.

Communicating with vulnerable young people

- 4.2.49 YP often feel like they are not being listened to by service providers and that they have no choice in what happens to them. Moreover, some feel that official buildings are not young-person friendly so they feel intimidated in these spaces.

- 4.2.50 Torfaen Young People Support Service (TYPSS) and Cwmbran Centre for Young People (CCYP) were seen as examples of good practice when it comes to both communicating with vulnerable YP and creating a YP-friendly environment.
- 4.2.51 Some service providers call for more widespread training for all staff working with vulnerable YP.

4.3 Proposals for a comprehensive and improved system of services

Introduction

- 4.3.1 This key section of the report reflects upon the research findings in order to make recommendations for a comprehensive and improved system of services for addressing the housing, social care and support needs of vulnerable young people in Torfaen. The findings lead the research team to two types of recommendation: i] about the broad principles of the service and ii] about specific service improvements. Notably, this study has been conducted in a dramatically changing political and socio-economic environment. Consequently, the research team has attempted to set the recommendations in this broad context.

Principles of the proposed Torfaen Homelessness System for young people

- 4.3.2 Five elements appear to be present in services identified as good practice and are absent from those perceived to be less effective. We therefore recommend that these elements constitute the five underlying principles of the proposed Torfaen Homelessness System: i] prevention, ii] partnership, iii] choice, iv] youth centred services and v] equality. We elaborate on each of these principles below and where specific recommendations have been identified in relation to these priorities, recommendations are made.

Prevention

- 4.3.3 Homelessness prevention is about enabling and supporting people to avoid homelessness. Our policy review demonstrates that services in Torfaen prioritise homelessness prevention but there is scope for further work. As Pawson et al (2006) state, the prevention ethos must infiltrate all levels of organisations: staff must see their role as primarily about assisting clients to avoid homelessness rather than rationing social housing.
- 4.3.4 *We recommend that prevention continues to be one of the key principles of the homelessness system for young people in Torfaen and that plans towards a wider Housing Solutions Service is further developed*

Partnership

- 4.3.5 There are various degrees of partnership working. At a basic level, it requires organisations to communicate on common issues and concerns, whereas at an advanced level, partnership working involves setting joint priorities, joint commissioning, and shared delivery of services. It is argued that more advanced levels of partnership working leads to reduced costs, reduced overlaps and improved outcomes for service users. This study indicates that many services, such as TYPSS, are operating at relatively advanced levels of partnership working and its positive impacts are recognised by service users. The importance of working in this way is heightened by the current socio-economic conditions, which require service providers to deliver more for less. There is evidence that partnership working could be improved in Torfaen.
- 4.3.6 *We recommend that partnership working continues to be one of the key principles of Housing Options for young people in Torfaen. Increased links should be made between TYPSS, Housing Options and SP funded housing related support services to ensure that the necessary support and advice is an option for YP.*

- 4.3.7 *More specifically, we recommend that TYPSS and the sister provisions in the north and south of the borough should continue to develop partnership arrangements with each other and they should explore opportunities to work more closely with education, training and employment providers, as well as substance misuse agencies, a GP and a housing officer.*

Choice

- 4.3.8 Our study has identified choice as an important element of an effective homelessness system. Within the constraints of the local housing market, young people must be enabled to take control over their housing pathways: where will they live? How much and what type of support is required? These are questions that young people should inform. Current policy and practice give limited indication that young people are able to make choices when they enter the homelessness system.
- 4.3.9 Torfaen goes some way to providing housing choice for vulnerable young people by giving them high or medium priority on the common housing register and by backdating care leavers applications to their 16th birthday.
- 4.3.10 Utilising the private rented sector (PRS) is a potential way of increasing the housing choices of young vulnerable people. However, the nature of the non-moving housing market in Torfaen and the current legislation means that the local authority in Torfaen have limited scope to take advantage of the local PRS. Nevertheless, the research team recommends that the local authority continue to explore greater housing access and choice.
- 4.3.11 *We recommend that choice continues to be one of the key principles of Housing Options for young people in Torfaen and that this is embodied within the development of a wider Housing Solutions Service.*

Youth-centred

- 4.3.12 Services working with young people must operate in ways that are young-person friendly: communication and the physical environment must all be appropriate to young people. This can only be achieved by regularly consulting young service users and acting on their comments. Policy documents of TYPSS and the Children and Young People's Partnership demonstrate a high level commitment to youth-centred working and service users clearly valued this approach. However, there are services that must become more youth-centred; these are mostly services where young people do not choose to attend, or services that also support adults.
- 4.3.13 *In light of very effective youth-centred work in TYPSS, staff should be supported to deliver training to front-line staff in all housing-related services that have contact with young people. This training must raise awareness of the experiences of young people and the nature of effective communication.*
- 4.3.14 *Torfaen's SP team in consultation with the Supporting People Planning Group and TYPSS should specify the characteristics of young-person friendly environments and outcomes for vulnerable young people within relevant SP/service provider contracts, SLAs and management agreements.*

Equality

- 4.3.15 Equality of access to services must be an underlying principle of the Torfaen homelessness system for young people. Young people expressed concerns that access to appropriate housing and support was sometimes limited due to: age, location, disability and offending behaviour. Whilst limited housing supply and limited resources will restrict the ability to deliver advice, support and housing to everyone, everywhere; this study clearly reveals that any redesign of services should seek to promote greater equality of access.

4.3.16 *We recommend that equality is one of the key principles of the homelessness system for young people in Torfaen.*

The proposed Torfaen Homelessness System for young people

4.3.17 This study found that throughout their housing pathways, homeless young people face a plethora of support needs; in some instances their needs are very effectively met, whilst in others there appear to be service gaps and deficiencies. Whilst recognising the wider political and socio-economic environment, this section sets out recommendations for the proposed Torfaen Homelessness System for young people. The recommendations relate to three key stages in a young person's homeless pathway: i] early prevention, ii] emergency accommodation, and iii] independent living support. There is also a fourth group of recommendations that deal with the needs of specific vulnerable groups of young people.

Early prevention

4.3.18 Early prevention is the first key stage in the proposed homelessness system for young people and it consists of three elements: i] information and advice, ii] behaviour, and iii] mediation. Recommendations in relation to each element are given below.

4.3.19 *School-age children and young people (aged 8-16) should be informed about that causes and nature of homelessness and where to seek advice if problems occur. Furthermore, children and young people must be taught independent living skills to prepare them for a transition to independent living. Whilst this type of provision already exists to some extent, we recommend making use of the Peer Educator model identified in the literature review and expanding provision in schools and Pupil Referral Units. All school-age children should receive this early intervention.*

4.3.20 *It is reported that the TYPSS housing advice service currently focuses on delivering advice to young people who are already homeless. Hence we recommend that Torfaen Housing Services should consider placing a Housing Advice Officer in TYPSS in order to provide earlier prevention advice.*

4.3.21 *The housing pathways of homeless young people reveal that individual behaviour is a key cause of homelessness. More needs to be done to detect this issue and intervene at an early stage to prevent homelessness. We recommend that a targeted project is established which aims to work with young people who have behavioural issues (e.g. in schools, youth clubs, YOT, PRUs) in order to: i] explain the potential consequences, and ii] address underlying issues. Where the behaviour of young people is already affecting family relationships, a referral should be made to a family mediation project.*

4.3.22 *EMPHASIS currently intervenes when young people are already planning to leave the family home, aged 16-17 years and unofficially this service is extended to 14-15 year olds. We recommend that the service should officially work with a broader age range of 14-25 years, recognising that difficulties often start far earlier than 16 and sometimes, much later. The service should continue to mediate at crisis-point but, in conjunction with the proposed behaviour intervention project, seek to identify and work with young people and their families before crisis-point.*

Emergency accommodation

4.3.23 Even if proposed improvements are implemented at the early prevention stage, some young people will become homeless in Torfaen. Whilst it will be possible to immediately place some young people in supported accommodation or an independent flat, a proportion of young people will need to be accommodated in emergency accommodation. Currently there are significant deficiencies in this provision, although Hales House is perceived very positively. We make recommendations in terms of quantity and quality of provision:

4.3.24 *We recommend that further temporary supported accommodation is made available, in a different part of the county to Hales House. The provision should follow the Hales House model (however, it should*

be smaller than the 20-bed Hales House) and the two supported housing schemes should be expected to work closely together to promote good practice and equality of provision across the county. The new provision must replace inappropriate temporary accommodation (e.g. B&Bs and adult hostels) used too frequently to accommodate homeless young people.

Independent living support

- 4.3.25 Providing suitable accommodation and support for young people who have experienced an initial trauma of becoming homeless is essential in enabling young people to make a successful and sustained transition to independent living. If priority is not given to this intervention then young people may make repeated returns into homelessness and will also make increasing demands on other services such as health, social care and the criminal justice system. We make recommendations in relation to: i] the type of accommodation available, ii] the assessment of needs and provision of support, and iii] the promotion of support services.
- 4.3.26 *The research finds that there is an increasing emphasis on working with the Private rented sector to accommodate young people who are homeless. Recent changes in the welfare benefit system indicate that young people are less likely to find affordable accommodation in the PRS and landlords are also less likely to accept homeless young people in receipt of benefits. Consequently, the challenge of working with the PRS is heightened. We recommend that Housing Services and TYPSS should forge stronger links with landlords willing to accommodate homeless young people. Landlord Liaison staff should be identified and landlords must be encouraged to get in contact in the event of any problems. The commissioners should consider the Coventry example identified in the literature review where a database is held on willing landlords and longer tenancies have been agreed with support mechanisms in place.*
- 4.3.27 *The research identified a very clear gap in the accommodation provided to homeless young people. The majority of young people take a very linear route through the homeless system, making a transition from 24 hour supported accommodation to independent living with only limited support. There is a clear need for accommodation which bridges this gap. We recommend that Tier 2 accommodation is provide for homeless young people who require some support and guidance as they seek to manage a tenancy, perhaps for the first time. This accommodation could take many forms but we suggest that a cluster arrangement would more effectively meet the needs of young people across the county. Most significantly, accommodation provider must recognise and account for the fact that homeless pathways are not uni-directional, young people will face difficulties and may need to return to accommodation where there is more support (e.g. from Tier 2 to Hales House or Independent flats to Tier 2).*
- 4.3.28 *The research recognises the importance of identifying support needs and acting to address them at an early stage. We recommend that a single early assessment of needs is undertaken when a young person is identified as homeless and this assessment is regularly reviewed with the young person. The assessment should consider a broad range of needs that go beyond housing, including education, employment and training and importantly it must assess emotional and mental health needs.*
- 4.3.29 *The research revealed that homeless young people often have limited or no family support. It is widely recognise that parental support extends into early 30s for most young people, so those who must manage their transitions into adulthood without it are significantly disadvantaged. The occasional support, normally provided by parents when a young person is living independently, will reduce the likelihood of repeat homelessness at relatively little cost. Some providers regularly see young people returning to ask for advice and guidance. This important 'provider as parent' role should be promoted and funded in a form of spend-to-save activity.*

- 4.3.30 *Existing support services should be promoted more widely to vulnerable young people (e.g. emotional and mental health support, debt advice and substance misuse support)*

The needs of specific vulnerable groups

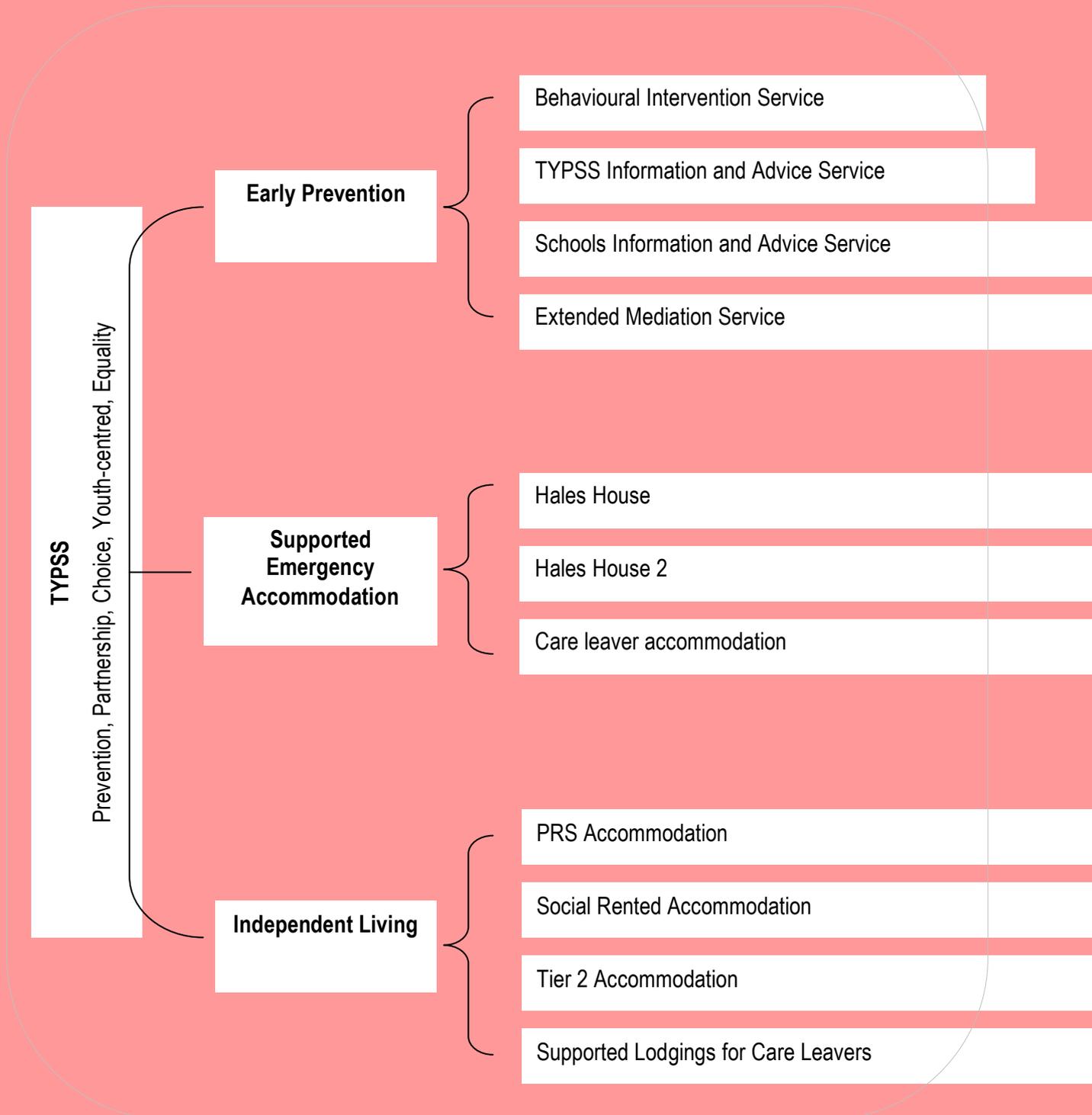
- 4.3.31 Many of the service changes identified above would impact on all young people but they are particularly pertinent to the young people who currently take a leaving home (service contact) pathway. Young people in the other pathways identified in Figure 1, appear to face challenges that warrant more specific intervention.
- 4.3.32 *Young people in the care leaver pathway enter and re-enter the homeless system at a range of different points (eg sofa surfing, B&B, supported accommodation, independent accommodation) and they predominantly attribute their homelessness to behavioural issues. Unlike young people in the leaving home pathways, service providers already know these young people, their needs should have been assessed, and a pathway plan should have been developed. Therefore, there should be no need for homeless care leavers to sofa surf or live temporarily in an adult hostel. We make two recommendations in this respect: i] care leavers who become homeless should be guaranteed accommodation in suitable accommodation. If high-level support is needed then this may be in Hales House or the new 4-bed provision. Alternatively, if less support is required, Tier 2 accommodation should be offered. An independent flat may also be suitable. ii] Some care leavers are accommodated in supported lodgings but there is not sufficient provision of this type. Concerted effort should be made to pool funding in order to extend and promote this form of accommodation for care leavers.*
- 4.3.33 *Young people in the leaving home (no service contact) pathway were not interviewed as part of this study but key stakeholders regularly commented on the needs of this group. This pathway is likely to be dominated by young people aged 18-24 who are not automatically categorised as priority need. These young people face difficulties accessing the PRS because of inequalities in rents, they are unlikely to be able to access social rented accommodation and therefore many are moving to other areas. The severity of this situation warrants considerable action. We recommend that the local authority treat these young people as a priority. Accommodation and support should be allocated to these young people wherever possible.*

Service diagram

- 4.3.34 Figure 2 illustrates the key elements of the proposed Torfaen Homelessness System for young people. It identifies the three key elements of the system, all of which should be managed and co-ordinated centrally by TYPSS.

4.4 Service diagram

Figure 2. Proposed Torfaen Homelessness System for young people



4.5 Concluding comments

Introduction

- 4.5.1 This study sought to understand the strengths, weaknesses and gaps in the delivery of housing and related support services for homeless young people and young people leaving care in Torfaen. The voices of young people and the service providers who work with them have been central to the research and we believe that this adds significant credence to the research recommendations.
- 4.5.2 Significantly, the research found that the model of service delivery in Torfaen is exemplary for Wales; joint-working arrangements appear to very effectively meet the needs of many young people. However, the report arrives at a set of recommendations which do two things: i] they guide the commissioners by identifying a set of principles that should underpin all future service changes, and ii] they set out specific changes that are likely to reduce homelessness and improve the experiences and outcomes for those young people who do become homeless.
- 4.5.3 We recognise that some of the recommendations will require investment and this comes at a time of significant reductions in spending within the public sector. Therefore it may not be possible to act upon all recommendations in the current climate but it is hoped that as the funding environment improves, these proposals will take priority.

A future research agenda

- 4.5.4 It is inevitable that new questions will emerge during the course of any study. In this brief and final sub section we identify several research questions that the commissioners may want to consider.
- 4.5.5 Firstly, the research indicates that the housing needs of single mothers, disabled people and ex-offenders are not being met. The depth of the evidence to support these claims was limited. Consequently, we suggest that a small pilot study might explore what research has already been done with these groups in Torfaen in order to determine whether a study of their needs and potential service gaps is required.
- 4.5.6 The research recommends the introduction of Tier 2 accommodation in Torfaen. There is only limited provision of this type in Wales and its value is poorly understood. Therefore, the commissioners should consider a comprehensive and longitudinal evaluation of the cost-benefits of this type of accommodation.
- 4.5.7 The research recommends that more be done to explore greater housing access and choice for vulnerable young people in Torfaen. In order to achieve this, the commissioners should consider undertaking a study that will improve understanding of the sector: i] what is the scale and nature of the sector locally, and ii] what can be done to improve access for vulnerable young people.

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