SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH COUNCIL FOR SINGLE HOMELESS

Prevention of homelessness is a growing area of interest that has been helped considerably by the publication of the Guidance on Prevention of Homelessness in 2009. This guidance document however should be seen as a starting point and not an end in itself in order to fully address the complexity of preventing homelessness generally and youth homelessness in particular.

In 2010 SCSH surveyed its members and interested parties regarding youth services & homelessness prevention[i]. From the findings it became apparent that there is a lot of good practice taking place across all Scotland, but not *all* of Scotland has good practice.

When questioned, service providers viewed some of the most common barriers to good practice in youth homelessness prevention as being:

- lack of appropriate housing (including supported accommodation)
- no provision of 'housing and leaving home education' in secondary schools
- lack of opportunities for joint working (including being sole service provider in their area)

Each of these barriers is surmountable in varying degrees with varying levels of input, but requires political will to make meaningful change.

Of these barriers, lack of suitable housing is easily the most prevalent. Suitable housing does not simply refer to the levels of all available housing stock, nor is it simply solved by building more houses, but includes increasing local availability of: suitable supported accommodation; affordable private rented accommodation and provision of high quality, safe shared accommodation.

Increasing the availability of a range of accommodation, particularly the provision of suitable supported accommodation can be seen as an expensive option, however this should be set against the expense of the cost of tenancy failure. SCSH has been looking at the costs of tenancy failure since 2006 and has calculated that each failed tenancy could cost as much as £20,000[ii] based on a young person spending an average of 6 months in temporary accommodation. This sum does not include further costs for resettlement or support into a new tenancy and covers minimal support while in temporary accommodation.

It is widely recognised that long stays in temporary accommodation have a negative effect on young people's chances of sustaining a tenancy- particularly B&B or hostel type accommodation and particularly for those under 18. This can be seen as being due to a range of factors, including: loss of confidence; increase in debts; difficulty in maintaining positive social networks, expense of participating in education and training; long term estrangement from family; stigma of being regarded as 'homeless'. A form of emergency accommodation that has proven successful in England and Wales is Nightstop[iii] (run by DePaul UK) which aims to help prevent

young people aged 16-17 getting involved in the homeless 'system' of B&Bs and emergency hostels by placing them for up to a week with trained, volunteer hosts, usually families, while other housing options are sought. The success of the Nightstop model rests on keeping young people out emergency accommodation and into more person-centred housing solutions- as well as the recruitment, training and ongoing support to hosts. There are 40 Nightstop projects in the UK of which Scotland only has two - Edinburgh and Ayr.

Investing in a greater variety of supported accommodation projects and encouraging the development of alternatives to emergency accommodation for under 18s would assist in preventing youth homelessness.

Shared accommodation is an issue that is likely to take on greater significance over the next few years due to the ongoing welfare reforms, particularly the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate to those under 35. This is likely to have an effect on both availability of shared accommodation for under 25s, as they will be competing with increasing demand from people aged 25-35. It also impacts on the safety of shared accommodation: it is likely that a private landlord would not consider the possible dangers of exploitation or risk of harm a young person might be exposed to when sharing accommodation with an older person who has perhaps been through the homeless system, prison, substance misuse, etc.. In addition, shared accommodation is not covered by any formal tenancy agreement, but is formed on the basis of an occupancy agreement. Occupancy agreements afford very few rights to the tenant and can be terminated with verbal notice only, placing the tenant in a very vulnerable position.

Developing guidance for private landlords with regard to shared accommodation would help prevent youth homelessness.

An overhaul of the current tenancy regime, strengthening tenants' rights within occupancy agreements, would also help ensure young tenants' safety and security of tenure, and thus help prevent homelessness.

The longer a young person can stay out of the homeless system, the greater his or her chances of a settled outcome. Family dispute is still the main reason for young people presenting as homeless. Mediation offers an opportunity for families and young people to improve communication and resolve differences. In many cases this results in a young person being able to stay at home. If leaving home is still the best option for both parties, mediation can help to maintain positive contact and support, which is often cited as a significant factor in maintaining a tenancy.

Edinburgh Cyrenians' Amber Mediation Service will be submitting their own paper to this enquiry. SCSH fully recommends their submission.

Research into the early triggers of youth homelessness has been well documented[iv] and is used as the basis for many existing preventative services and interventions. The link between young people running away from home and later homelessness is also known, but as the issue of young runaways frequently sits within the remit of children's services and child protection, there is often a lack of joint working with housing and homelessness/homelessness prevention service planning. Running away from home is often not reported to the police or to schools and so opportunities for effective early intervention are missed.

Aberlour: ROC & Emilie Smeaton, Director of Paradigm Research will be submitting their own papers focused on young runaways to this enquiry. SCSH fully recommends their submissions.

As an example of a specific gap in service provision, SCSH research[v] with young people in their first tenancies who have experienced homelessness showed that none of the 25 young people who participated in research had received any form of housing advice on either the process of leaving home, the sorts of tenancies available nor what to do if they became homeless while at school.

There was a general feeling that having this knowledge would have made a difference to their situation especially given the proximity for many between leaving school and when they made their homelessness application.

> *I think so definitely well it was only about two month after I left high school I went in homeless and that...it would have been beneficial...*

A barrier to housing education taking place in secondary schools is that of teacher awareness. Many teachers have little knowledge of contemporary housing options, or of the true extent of the lasting consequences of homelessness. Continuing professional development (CPD) and the full support of Education Scotland could help overcome this barrier.

For a number of years, SCSH has provided free downloadable 'leaving home and housing education' session plans for use in schools and youth work settings. Evaluation has shown that where they are used, teachers find them to be a valuable resource and young people benefit from increased knowledge and awareness of realistic housing options, however teachers struggle to include leaving home and housing education within the already crowded Personal, Social, Health and Economic curriculum.

 [For more examples of good practice from direct research with young tenants who have experience of homelessness, please see attached Annex 1, 'Young People's Views']

Increasing the availability of leaving home and housing education in all secondary schools would be one simple action that could be effective in preventing youth homelessness.

Ensuring the uptake of CPD in housing and homelessness, supported by Education Scotland would also help prevent youth homelessness.

Establishing what constitutes good or effective practice is complex. Overall, it is difficult to assess the true extent of good practice as it is not fully mapped, measured or reported formally. SCSH carries out regular research in good practice and prevention activity, however not all services record similar measures. It can sometimes be difficult to define what makes practice 'good' when measures of effectiveness, impact, cost-effectiveness, outputs, outcomes, engagement or involvement often seem to be interchangeable -and yet they can each have very different meanings and inferences.

Even at its simplest a measure of good practice isn't always that 'fewer young people are homeless' after having been involved in a particular service or process: a range of factors can be influential (e.g., local supply of good quality housing, availability of range of support, financial factors, ongoing family contact, etc) as well as a range of outcomes (entered supported accommodation, temporary return to family home or even consistently engaging with services).

Some outcomes might look positive at first, but closer analysis belies it, e.g., someone maintaining a tenancy for over a year - which is a fairly standard measure - might look like a success, but if the young tenant has spent the year miserable, feeling isolated or endangered, it can't be viewed as a true success and may lead to increased risk of future tenancy breakdowns. Similarly, if someone has moved from their tenancy after a matter of months might look like tenancy failure - but this might not be the case if they've moved for other reasons, e.g. moved area for work/training/education, moved in with partner, returned by mutual agreement to family home etc.

Developing a standardised tool for the definition and measurement of what constitutes youth homelessness prevention would be beneficial to ensure consistency of approach across Scotland.

No young person leaving care should be made to apply as homeless. This has been an official policy position since the publication of the Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations in 2003, and yet each year up to 200 young people (4% of all young people leaving care) present as homeless directly from leaving a care background. Added to this number, around 2000 young people who have previously been looked after *who have chosen to disclose their care background* [vi] also presented as homeless last year.

The Code of Guidance on Homelessness[vii] offers clear steps that should be taken to ensure that young care leavers are not forced through the homeless route. In particular, the guidance states that 'young people leaving care should be allocated a pathway coordinator'. It goes further and states that;

> *'Local authorities should also take a corporate responsibility for ensuring that regular checks are made on the housing circumstances of those that have left*

care for at least two years after they do so. The emphasis should be on sustaining housing arrangements which meet the needs of the individual or on providing constructive arrangement where they do not'

(Code of Guidance on Homelessness, Chapter 2, paragraph 47)

Often problems that will lead to homelessness start long before a young person leaves care due to a lack of either a pathways coordinator or plan in place early enough for the young person to engage with the process; insufficient preparation for independent living when leaving care; lack of coordination with between social work, through care workers and housing departments; 'rationing' of pathways planning to the exclusion of those looked after at home/in kinship care/fostered. Tracking and monitoring of young care leavers is often the exception rather than the rule - and where it does occur, it rarely goes beyond the advised two year minimum.

Consistent application of the Code of Guidance on Homelessness and the and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations , with particular regard to the continuing role of the local authority as corporate parent, and ensuring all young people in care have early access to a pathways plan would contribute to helping prevent youth homelessness.

SCSH has considerable experience in sharing good practice in the field of homelessness and youth homelessness prevention and for several years SCSH has made sharing practice a focus of our youth work. To that end we have developed and distributed number of youth homelessness prevention resources, including: the 'Streets Ahead guide to leaving home and housing'; the 'My Space My place tenancy sustainment resource'; the 'Parents' Guide to leaving home' and the 'Carer's Guide to leaving home'. In addition, we host the www.leavinghome.info website and the www.practicebites.info database of good practice. Complementing this, we regularly hold training, seminars and conferences, all with an aim of sharing good practice. Further practice sharing occurs through virtual Knowledge Hubs[viii] - and there are plans for a new Youth Homelessness KHUB to be in place by April 2012.

Continued support of SCSH's practice sharing work would contribute to helping prevent youth homelessness.

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3 February 2012

Notes:

[i] 138 (89%) of survey respondents provided a response to the question' Can you identify gaps in service provision in your area'. There was no limit to the number of gaps respondents were able to identify. For ease of representation, those gaps in services that survey respondents would like to see addressed that were identified by more than one survey respondent are identified in the below table[i].

Gap in service provision	Number of survey respondents who identified this provision as a gap	Percentage of survey respondents who identified this provision as a gap
More furniture provision/initiatives	6	4.35
Outreach support for young people when moving from supported accommodation	3	2.17
Employment opportunities for young people	3	2.17
Educational support and training for young people	5	3.62
Range of appropriate accommodation	11	7.97
Mediation services	8	5.80
Supported accommodation	31	22.46
Increase in affordable quality housing	6	4.35
Supported lodgings	6	4.35
More temporary accommodation	2	1.45
Adolescent mental health services	3	2.17
Training for professionals working to reduce youth homelessness	2	1.45
Joint working/interagency work and holistic approaches to address youth homelessness prevention	10	7.25
Through care and after care planning	4	2.90
Support with tenancy sustainment	4	2.90
Alternative accommodation options to independent living such as shared accommodation	2	1.45
Secondary education on causes and prevention of homelessness	6	4.35
Work with families	4	2.90
Development of independent living skills	2	1.45
Emergency accommodation for young people	2	1.45
Alcohol/drug units	3	2.17

As the table reveals, provision of different forms of accommodation are identified as the most common gap in service provision. The lack of supported accommodation was identified by 31 (22.46%) survey respondents. Also of note is the number of stakeholders who identified the lack of a joined up approach between agencies. There is also some recognition of the importance of early preventative work in schools as six survey respondents identified this preventative work as a gap in their local area.

[From 'Meeting Scottish Government Youth Homelessness Prevention Targets: How the Scottish Council for Single Homeless can Effectively Target Activities to Support Stakeholders' internal report produced by
Emilie Smeaton (Paradigm Research) 2010]

[ii] Scottish Council for Single Homeless, 'The Costs of Tenancy Failure 2011,'
http://www.scsh.org.uk/index.php?page=briefings

[iii] For more information, see http://www.depaulnightstopuk.org/

[iv] e.g., Deborah Quilgars, Sarah Johnsen and Nicholas Pleace, Youth Homelessness in the UK : A Decade of Progress? (JRF, 2008)

[v] SCSH and University of Stirling jointly supervise PhD candidate, Alasdair Stewart. The research project explores the experiences of young people (aged 16 – 24), who have previously been homeless or in care, when they have moved into their own permanent tenancy. Although there exists statistics that this age group are at a higher risk of leaving their tenancy within the first year the reasons why are not fully known. In order to explore this question the research project involves interviewing young people who are in their own tenancy. By getting an insight into their opinions and experience on how they find living in their own tenancy it should help improve understandings of the challenges they face and if they are overcome. Additionally, by contacting each person three times over a year it is hoped to keep contact with those who leave their tenancy to get their opinion of why they left.

[vi] The disclosure of a care background is optional in a homeless interview.

[vii] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/05/31133334/33400 Chapter 2, paragraphs 41-48.

[viii] https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/group/homelessnesspolicypracticeandpreventionscotland &
http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/c/13001454/home.do (Housing Strategy Officers Network)