

A REVIEW OF THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PROVISION IN THE NORTON-RADSTOCK AREA OF B&NES

May – July 2008

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1. Executive Summary

This report provides a brief snapshot of the problem of youth homelessness in the Norton Radstock area and surrounding rural communities. The research was undertaken by a small Task and Finish Group set up from the Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Panel and carried out between May – July 2008.

The causes and risks associated with homelessness was examined first which identified why young people become homeless within B&NES. The most common case is that parents are no longer willing to accommodate their children. National research suggests that young people who are at the highest risk of becoming homeless come from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, however each individual case is unique and is very hard to categorise.

Central Government announced a package of measures (2006) to further prevent and tackle youth homelessness. The challenge to our services and partner agencies will be to ensure that there are no gaps between services, and that a joint protocol in the delivery of these services is developed, which integrates the work of the voluntary agencies.

Data on the extent of homelessness is not recorded centrally by our local authority but has to be gathered from a variety of partner and voluntary agencies. The data is therefore not accurate. I.e. current figures do not take into account the possibility of a young person being recorded by several different agencies. The Task and Finish Group felt that if the authority does not collect and monitor this information then the problem cannot effectively be dealt with.

Current situation In Norton Radstock:

- Young people are approaching different agencies in order to assist them with their housing needs rather than one single integrated pathway.
- There is no single centre or 'one stop shop' where young people can get all the advice and support they need, and support is often displaced and difficult to obtain
- There is a high demand for supported living in Norton Radstock which will not be met by the projected increases in the supported lodgings scheme.
- There are a limited amount of B&B's in Norton Radstock, many are being placed in Bristol.
- There is a gap in the provision of services 16-17 year olds within the Local Authority.

Task group recommendations and practical solutions:

1. B&NES commissions further research in order to analyse the extent of the problem in the Norton Radstock area.
2. B&NES setup a working group to establish a Youth Homeless Strategy to examine the situation in both urban and rural area across the whole of Bath and North East Somerset.
3. B&NES should consider appointing a Youth Homelessness Officer to work on the development and implementation of a Youth Homelessness Strategy and co-ordinating between the Housing and Children's services and different agencies. His/her role should be piloted in the Norton Radstock Area first with the intention of expanding it across the whole of the authority.
4. B&NES should work with other agencies to establish a Youth Foyer in the Norton Radstock area which would provide supported accommodation and a one stop shop for homeless young people, acting as a single referral pathway thus providing an integrated more efficient service.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR YOUTH HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP WORK

Introduction

The problem of Youth Homelessness was first mentioned at the CYP Panel meeting on the 28th Jan 08 when Councillors Nathan Hartley and David Speirs asked if the Children and Young People Panel could receive a report on Youth Homelessness. After looking at this report - 'Temporary Accommodation Review' conducted by what was the Housing and Community Safety Panel 2007, the CYP Panel agreed at their meeting on the 17th March 2008 that there were specific issues concerning Youth Homelessness which were not tackled by the previous review.

A final decision was made by the CYP Panel to setup a cross panel Task and Finish Group to examine the problem and report back to the Panel in July 08.

Task and Finish Group – role and methodology

A Task and Finish Group was set up by the Children and Young People Services Overview & Scrutiny Panel (O&S) to look at the problem of Youth Homelessness specifically within Norton-Radstock and the surrounding rural communities.

A Task and Finish Group may be established by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the purpose of conducting an in depth review of any Council service, policy or issue that affects the lives of the residents of B&NES. Matters requiring review by a task and finish group generally arise from issues which have been identified by one of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

Once the evidence has been considered through

- Research of currently available information and data
- Conversations/interviews with relevant officers/organisations

The Task and Finish Group produces a report containing details of the evidence gathered, their conclusions and subsequent recommendations.

The report is then submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel who in turn may refer the report to the Cabinet or any partner agencies affected, asking them to consider the recommendations arising from the investigation and how things could be improved.

Objective

The Task and Finish Group decided to investigate the extent of the youth homelessness problem in Norton-Radstock and surrounding rural communities and make recommendations about how the Council and/or other agencies can deal with this problem satisfactorily.

The work would also aim to support the Government targets set out in 2006 which outlined a new package of measures delivered through a Youth Homelessness scheme:

- *a commitment that by 2010, no 16 or 17 year olds should be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation by a local authority under the homelessness legislation, except in an emergency;*
- *improving access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people), so that there is a universal expectation of such services;*

- *establishing supported lodgings schemes across the country, providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home.*

Scope

To achieve the above objective the Task and Finish group decided to investigate the following areas:-

1. Establish the extent of the problem of youth homelessness.
2. To determine best practice in other local authorities
3. To contact voluntary organisations and other agencies who currently work with homeless people to determine what support they currently offer and what could be offered.
4. To make practical solutions for recommendations to any problems identified within the report.

Excluded from Task and Finish Group work

- people over the age of 25 years
- All wards outside of the Somer Valley

Outputs

To produce a report for the relevant O&S Panel (Children's Services and Safer, Stronger Communities) with recommendations which will be made available to the relevant Council Cabinet Member and/or other organisations to consider and make a response.

Constraints

- **Timescales.** Task and Finish Groups plan for 2-3 months, and aim to provide a concise and brief update of findings to a CYP Overview & Scrutiny Panel on the 21st July 2008
- **Budget.** The work must be managed within the budget available to the Panel, in consultation with the Panel Chair.
- **Process.** The investigation will be carried out in accordance with the Bath & North East Somerset Council Overview and Scrutiny processes.
- **Resource.** Project management resource is available from the Overview & Scrutiny Team, Democratic Services.

Task and Finish working group Team

Lead Task and Finish Group Councillor:	Cllr David Speirs
Task and Finish Group Members:	Cllr Nathan Hartley
	Cllr Eleanor Jackson
	Cllr Shirley Steel
Overview and Scrutiny Project Officer	Donna Vercoe

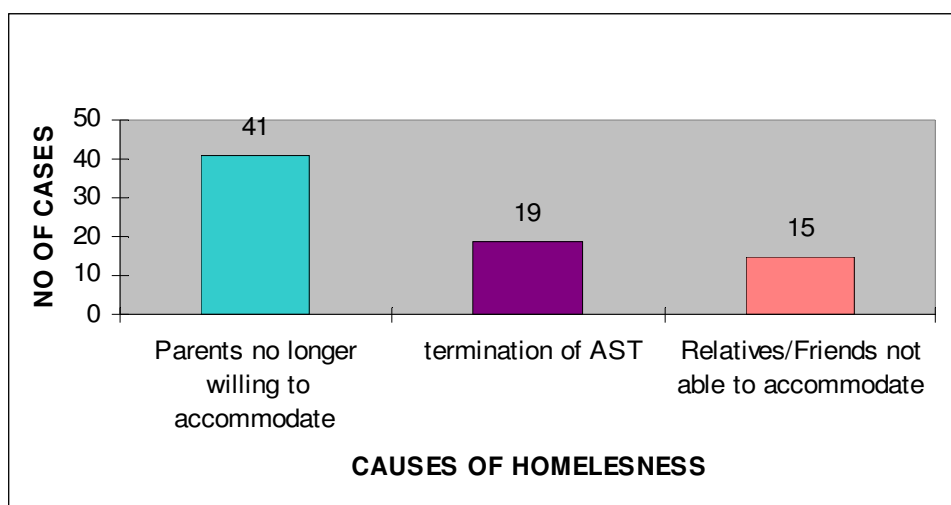
Note: By 'homeless' we mean not having a secure and permanent place to call one's own, rather than a lack of a roof above one's head and a bed to sleep on.

3. REPORT FINDINGS

Background

What are the causes of Youth Homelessness?

According to data provided by B&NES Housing Options and Homelessness Service the primary reason for homeless in B&NES is because parents are no longer willing to accommodate (41 Cases) with secondary reasons being the termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (19 Cases) and friends and relatives not being able to accommodate.² (See below graph)



The Quarterly Homelessness Report³ March 2008 also highlights the main reasons for loss of settled home for those accepted between 1st January and the 31st March 2008. (See Appendix Pie Chart) One of the main reasons identified is also the termination of assured shorthold tenancy.

According to the research conducted by Dr Joan Smith (Centre for Housing and Community Research) the following eight independent risk factors are identified with Youth Homelessness⁴:

- 1 Didn't get on with mother.
- 1 Moved house more than twice.
- 1 Mother aged 24 years or below at birth of first child
- 1 Living with foster parent or in care, with a step-parent or a relative at age 12 years.
- 1 Badly off as a child

³ <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/BathNES/Housing/homeless/Quarterlyhomelessreport%28Q40708%29.htm>

⁴ www.foyer.net/mpn/downloads/joan_smith_summary_document.pdf accessed July 2008

- 1 Hit frequently in the course of an argument.
- 1 Shared room at 12 years.
- 1 Excluded from school.

Subsequently a similar occurrence of these risk factors was found for young homeless people in Birmingham and the Cotswolds. They appear to be robust indicators in urban and rural areas.⁵

It does appear that young people who are at the highest risk of becoming homeless come from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Other potential risk factors⁶:

- Disruptive or antisocial behaviour
- Overt parental conflict or lack of parental support and/or boundaries
- Involvement in or risk of offending
- Poor attendance or exclusion from school
- Experience of bullying
- Disengagement from education, training or employment post 16
- Poor nutrition
- Ill health
- Substance misuse
- Anxiety or depression
- Pregnancy and parenthood.

What risks are associated with Youth Homelessness? ⁷

Risk to health

- Increased emotional distress and mental health problems
- Estrangement or isolation from family and friends leading to reduced emotional support
- Substance misuse, including smoking and alcohol
- Poor diet due to living outside the family on a low income
- Increased sexual activity bringing the risk of pregnancy and of infections.

⁵ ibid

⁶ Joint working between Housing and Children's Services. Preventing homelessness and tackling its effects on children and young people – May 2008

⁷ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/goodpracticeguide> May 2008 (see report appendix)

Risks to safety

- § Inappropriate accommodation such as B&B
- § Being drawn into prostitution and sexual exploitation
- § Involvement in anti-social behaviour or offending
- § Failed accommodation placements or tenancies leading to 'intentional homelessness'
- § Decisions and exclusion by supported accommodation providers and landlords
- § There is emerging anecdotal evidence of increased risk to young people in temporary, especially B&B, of being targeted for recruitment into gangs in areas where they are active.

Risks to enjoyment and achievement

- dropping out of, or being less likely to take up, education, training or employment
- no longer participating in pastimes such as sporting and creative activities
- losing touch with friends and social networks.

Risks to economic well being

- Financial stress and poverty
- Long term poverty and social exclusion when education, training or employment is disrupted.

The Government Strategy

16 and 17 year olds (with certain exceptions) and young people aged between 18 and 20 who were formerly in care have a priority need for accommodation under the homelessness legislation (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996). This means they must be secured suitable accommodation if they become homeless through no fault of their own.

The Government's strategy for Youth Homelessness is to⁸:

- § Prevent vulnerable young people becoming homeless, through early Identification and intervention;
- § Support homeless young people and those living in temporary accommodation
- § To ensure their housing and wider support needs are met;
- § Manage the transition of young people between temporary and settled
- § Accommodation to ensure continued access to the services they need.

As part of the programme to implement the homelessness strategy the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced a package of measures to further prevent and tackle youth homelessness in November 2006:

- § A commitment that, by 2010, 16 and 17 year olds will not be placed in bed and breakfast hotels unless it is an emergency,
- § improving access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people), so that there is a universal expectation of such services
- § Establishing supported lodgings schemes across the country, providing accommodation and advice for young people who can no longer stay in the family home.

In May 2008 the Government produced guidance on the Joint Working Housing and Children's Services – Preventing Homelessness and tackling its effects on children and young people.⁹

This guidance, jointly prepared by Communities and Local Government and the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), is designed to help the strategic managers of Children's Services and Housing Services, in both unitary and two

⁸ Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives – March 2005

⁹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/goodpracticeguide> May 2008 (see report appendix)

tier authorities, to plan and deliver change in order to achieve three things for young people and children living with their families:

- prevent homelessness
- minimise the negative impact of homelessness on their lives and life chances
- make sure they receive the co-ordinated services and support they need to recover from the impact of homelessness and get their lives back on track, including maintaining or returning to their journey through learning or work.

The challenge for Children's Services and Housing Services is to ensure that there are no gaps between services, and that young people and children living in families get quick access to the services they need regardless of which service they approach for help first.

This is consistent with the Government's Every Child Matters programme for better integrated services to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. The Children Act (2004) (section 10) sets out a statutory requirement for local authorities and their 'relevant' partners to cooperate to improve children's well-being.

This guidance suggests that authorities put into place joint protocols in the delivery of services for young homeless people and building strategies which integrate the work of voluntary agencies.

Parallel B&NES Council Action: Report to the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel. 8 July 2008

At this meeting the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services and Housing gave an update report to this O & S Panel. The Cabinet Member was asked to comment on the following paragraph taken from Performance report presented to the Healthier communities & Older People Overview & Scrutiny Panel 2007/08.

'BV183a Homeless-Stay in Bed and Breakfast. And BV183b Homeless: Stay in Hostels
'While performance in the past few years has shown dramatic improvements, we are currently experiencing significant challenges, particularly since Christmas. These challenges relate to increased numbers of statutory homeless households coming into the system and homeless households not leaving temporary accommodation (TA) fast enough..... we are planning additional homelessness prevention strategies to attempt to reduce the numbers going into TA. '

The Cabinet Member explained that the £2.5 million funding which was to be used was the

result of a CLG bid from Bath churches. The council would provide a further £200,000 and this would make a hostel a viable option. The Housing Association will also provide £44,000 per unit. This funding will help utilise 1-3 James Street where the Genesis trust is presently based, as well as the soup kitchen.

According to the data supplied in the report, the average stay in a B&B is 3.45 weeks, an increase from 3.14 weeks, and the stay in hostels has risen from 14.11 in 2006/7 to 17.81 weeks. Only one person has been identified as a 'rough sleeper', which does not reflect the findings within this report.

During the same meeting the Government's requirement that there be a GP Led Health Centre commissioned by the PCT was discussed. This is intended to be created by upgrading the Riverside NHS Centre. The creation of a centre would be of great benefit to the homeless, who are often not registered with GPs and yet are afflicted with chronic health problems which would benefit from specialist GP attention.

4. Report Findings (Measuring the Problem)

Extent of the Youth Homelessness problem in the Norton – Radstock Area

Data Collection

It was extremely difficult to gain accurate data on the number of young homeless people in the Norton Radstock Area as this data is not recorded by the local authority. However, more data is available from contacting Pathways. (*Run by Bath Self Help Housing Association and supports 15 young people in their own homes for up to 2 years*)

The majority of our data was collected by visiting a variety of different partner agencies/ organisations and having fact to face interviews with individuals or organisations directly involved or associated with youth Homelessness in the Norton Radstock area.

The task and finish group was able to establish the following information:

- 1 From October- December 2007 Project 28 outreach workers identified 68 Homeless Young People in the Norton Radstock Area living in two squats. The young people were widely using the illegal drug Ketimin.¹⁰
- 1 Connexions identify 13 Young People experiencing “a significant housing problem” in Norton Radstock¹¹
- 1 Off the Record have identified 13 young homeless people in Norton Radstock.
- 1 Ward Councillors have encountered around 24 young people who are homeless.

Case Studies identified from carrying out research into the extent of the youth Homelessness problem in Norton Radstock

The following accounts are case studies of young homeless people in the Norton Radstock Area. They have been provided by a ward councillor

Case study 1

RV seemed a normal bright teenager attending Norton Hill School and getting good results. He clearly had leadership qualities as seen by the way he organised the St Nicholas School squatters. However, his mum re-married, and although he is very fond of his young half siblings who he takes to Trinity Primary School etc, he feels there is no room in her crowded small house. He trained as a chef, but owing to depression has never held a job down for more than a year. He is trying to run a gardening business. He is close

¹⁰ Information provided by Liz Ball, Project 28 Worker, 28th May 2008

¹¹ Information provided by Anne Robbins (B&NES) - 1st May 2008

to his Dad, Mr V, and is currently living in a caravan with his partner, who is pregnant.

Case Study 2

Mrs V, his stepmother, approached us when we were collecting signatures on the Youth Homelessness petition. Her beloved son 'W', who would have been 32 last month, developed epilepsy and became very troubled and confused. She could not cope, but always kept in touch with him. He was re-housed eventually to the Salvation Army hostel in Bristol where she says the staff was marvellous but being so far from Radstock was very difficult for him. Unfortunately he died from drug abuse.

Case Study 3

C is a chronic alcoholic though only 20. He gets his supplies from McColls and is confused, but never aggressive, by 9.30 am. He spends the day by the war memorial. His parents were persuaded to take him back after a spell in a hostel in Twerton where loneliness made his condition worse. He was part of the squat. He is never violent, but often so spaced out he is at risk. C would like a foyer in the area.

Case Study 4

Ms SK (21) also very articulate. Left Writhlington without qualifications and had a baby at 17. She was very troubled because of an acrimonious divorce when she was 16, but being from a devout Roman Catholic family did not know how to avoid pregnancy. She is devoted to her son, who starts school in September. She has been re-housed after a period of being in and out of a hostel in Bath where conditions were so bad that she gave her son to her mother to look after for four months. The drug dealer infested conditions around her maisonette (Somer Housing) are appalling. She wants smaller ground floor accommodation. SK is now in a stable relationship with the, father of her baby and wants a normal family life.

Case Study 5

Ms KB (19) approached MP Dan Norrris, a sofa surfer who suffers from depression and the effects of abuse by a neighbour. She now lives with her 3 year old in her mother's house. She had applied for social accommodation all over the area but wants to stay in Radstock because of her health problems and family support network.

Case Study 6

Ms G (19) is living in an overcrowded Somer house where her mother has lived for 19 years. She has a 2 year old and is living with her three younger sisters. Her older brother and sister have been able to find accommodation and have stable families. She wants to

stay close to them. She was very badly injured in a car accident when she was 14 and missed a year's school so left without qualifications.

Case Study 7

Ms LD is (18) and has a baby that she and her mother claim is the mother's. The mother keeps having fits of depression and abandoning the family (children aged 18, 14, 3 and 11) There are 8 children altogether. The older two live in squats in Bristol because they cannot earn enough to afford rented accommodation. The family were re-housed ten years ago by Kilmersdon Rural Housing Association (Mendip) in a house in Radstock.

Case Study 8

T took to drugs in his teens and was thrown out of the parental home. He moved from squat to squat then resolved to go clean and return home. He found his parents had moved to Ireland. When he tracked them down, thinking this was his chance, as he was away from his old associates, they slammed the door in his face. Somehow he got back to Radstock and knocked on the door of a classmate who had managed to move back home. They could not take him in, so he was sleeping rough until they managed to get him into Julian House. He is still on drugs.

5. Report Findings (Current B&NES resources)

B&NES Resources for Youth Homelessness in Norton Radstock¹²

1. Pathways floating support service¹³,

Pathways, a supported housing project, are run by Bath Self Help Housing Association. They have thirteen units of accommodation for homeless young people (aged 16-19) and provide residents with the necessary skills to obtain (and sustain) independent accommodation.

The outreach support service helps homeless young people to get the best possible chance to move from emergency to more permanent and suitable accommodation by providing advice and guidance.

The floating support service helps young people who are tenants of a Registered Social Landlord to maintain their tenancy by helping them to address issues that can lead to tenancy breakdown. In addition to Wells Road, Pathways also manage 7 units of self contained move-on accommodation for young people aged 16-25. These units have a maximum stay of 2 years.

2. The Hawthorns

- Provides 4 units of supported accommodation for young people and is situated in Midsomer Norton.
- This is also run by Bath Self Help Housing Association and funded by Supported People.

3. The in-house Supported Lodgings project

- Currently provides 11 young people with supported housing throughout B&NES and 4 of these placements are in the Norton Radstock area.
- The aim is to have 20 places available in the whole area by 2010.

4. Off the Record

Off the Record, does not provide a service specifically to address housing issues. However, they do provide services that provide support, information and counselling. This is provided from 3 offices in Bath, Keynsham and Midsomer Norton. Off the Record

¹² Provided by Graham Sabourn (B&NES Group Manager Housing and Supported Living) - 13th June 2008

¹³ <http://www.1bigdatabase.org.uk/details.php?dir=u&id=800&keywords=tenants&sort=name>

specifically have services for: Young Parents; Young Carers; an Advocacy service and support for children and young people who are dealing with domestic violence. In addition they provide a free legal advice service at the Bath Office.

- All of the services deal with housing issues on a needs led basis
- Runs a Young Parents Project and works with people throughout B&NES in their own homes.
- During the 12 months the drop in service in Midsomer Norton has dealt with 7 young people in need of housing support: (1 living in a car, 2 in a squat, 1 in a caravan, 1 sofa surfing, 2 housed in Bath.)
- However, moving to accommodation in Bath further isolates young people from support and friends
- ‘Shout Out’, Off the Records advocacy service has provided advocacy for over 100 young people of these 24 lived in the Norton Radstock area and of those 4 presented with housing issues

5. Connexions West¹⁴

Connexions is a youth support service for young people aged 13 – 19. It has been set up to offer every young person, whatever their circumstances, access to the best possible support and information to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood, citizenship and working life. Lots of organisations that support young people will be working together under the banner of Connexions.

The Connexions service has been available from Connexions West of England since April 2001 and supports young people who live in Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

- Figures for young people with homeless housing crisis issues in the Norton-Radstock area captured from Connexions during May 2008 are 13 young people
- the largest number of those young people registered as having homelessness crisis issues are aged 19 years

6. Project 28

Project 28 is a young people's drug and alcohol treatment service and is funded by the Bath and North East Somerset Community and Drugs Safety Partnership.

¹⁴ www.connexionswest.org.uk

Based in central Bath, Project 28 works with young people up to the age of 19 who are resident within the BANES area and are an open access service.

Project 28 provides Holistic packages of care to young people who have substance misuse needs. They also provide drug and alcohol information and advice, one to one counselling, alternative therapies, diversionary activities, voluntary work opportunities and training to partner agencies. Where needed Project 28 can also provide young people with substitute prescribing or interventions around dual diagnoses issues.

- During Oct-Dec 2007 Project 28 outreach workers in the Norton-Radstock area met 68 homeless young people
- These were mostly staying in two squats in the area. After Christmas they were thrown out of the squats and thus the detached youth workers lost contact. Project 28 is led to believe that most went onto sofa surf.
- The main reason suggested for this youth homelessness was the large use of the drug Ketamin which has been highly available in the area for some time

7. Other support

In addition young people (18 years or over) from the Norton Radstock area are also able to access the 31 units of supported housing at Bath Foyer (Twerton), and the 13 units at Frome YMCA Foyer.

6. Task Group's analysis of the current situation

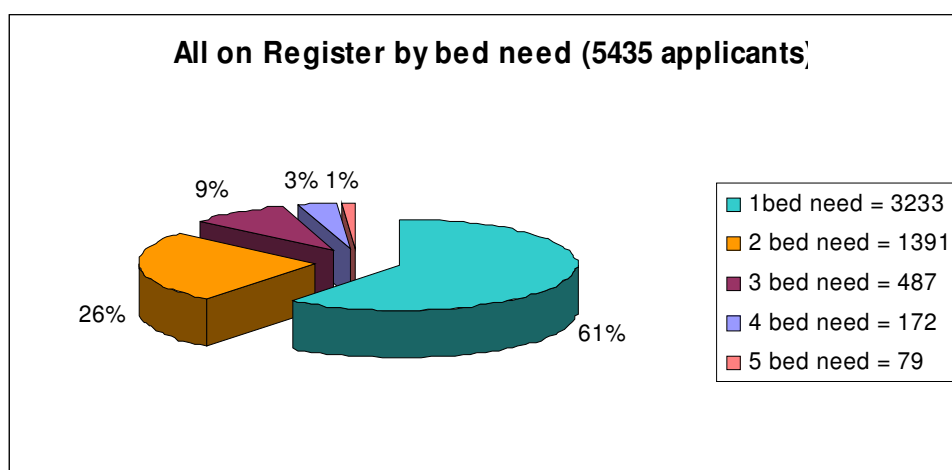
The Task and Finish Group was concerned that the local authority did not have accurate information concerning the numbers of young people who were homeless in the Norton Radstock area. The group felt that If the authority does not possess this information and is not collecting and monitoring this data then the problem cannot be effectively deal with.

Research revealed that young people are approaching different agencies in order to assist them with their housing needs. Because of this there is no single integrated pathway for young people who are homeless and no single point of contact. Therefore there is a high need for more integrated working between different agencies that are helping young homeless people in Norton Radstock.

There is currently no single centre or one stop shop in Norton – Radstock where young homeless people can visit to get all the advice support they need. Access to information and support is displaced and difficult to obtain. The Task and Finish Group felt that this is a missed opportunity since agencies seem willing to work closer together.

There is high demand for supported living accommodation in the Norton-Radstock Area which will not be met by the projected increases in the supported lodging schemes.

From the data across the local authority we know that the majority of people demanding accommodation require single bed flats – this is true for most homeless young people.
(See below pie chart of the registered bed need in B&NES)



Data from B&NES Housing Options and Homelessness Presentation, Mike Chedzoy - 29th April 2008

It appears that a large number of young people are being sent into Bed and Breakfast accommodation. In the Norton Radstock area there is currently a limited number of B&B's

that can be used to house young people, many are instead being placed in Bristol. This disrupts their social networks and can leave them isolated. This will continue to increase when the local authority follow the Government Strategy to eliminate B&B use by 2010 which will create additional pressures to find suitable accommodation.

Young People are able to access the Bath Foyer although this is a considerable distance from Norton Radstock. They can also only access this service if they are 18 years old or over. There is therefore a gap in provision for 16-17 year old's within the local authority.

Homelessness may seem to be a generic problem in an area of low wages, under skilled workforce and reduced life expectancy, plus a higher than average rate of teenage pregnancy and infant mortality, but the solution cannot be 'one size it's all'. What is agreed is the vulnerability of the young people concerned. We have also established that this is a marginalised group with fluctuating numbers. It is connected to a sub-culture both in the youth scene in the area and to the travelling community. This is illustrated by the mushrooming 'squat' in St Nicholas' School.

Best Practice Models

The most recent Government on youth homelessness states that there should be joint working between the local authority Housing and Children's Services and with different agencies working with homeless young people.

The key elements underpinning effective joint work to prevent and mitigate the effects of homelessness on children and young people are¹⁵:

- The development of joint protocols
- a shared ethos of prevention
- making strategic connections and developing shared strategic objectives a targets
- effective use of joint resources to achieve shared aims
- sharing information
- Use of the Common Assessment Framework
- involving children, young people and parents.

Consistent, reliable and sustainable joint working can only be achieved through formal agreements between the relevant agencies, referred to in this guidance as joint protocols.

Joint protocols enable partners and services users to understand their roles and confidently engage in joint working. They lead to better communication, increased and more effective joint working and better outcomes for clients

Housing and Children's Services Authorities and departments will want to consider which agencies should be involved in the development and implementation of joint protocols to meet specific objectives.

¹⁵ Joint working between Housing and Children's Services. Preventing homelessness and tackling its effects on children and young people – May 2008

If joint working in preventing and tackling homelessness and its effects is to be sustainable and attract necessary resources, it must be robustly linked to the strategic priorities and frameworks directing the work of the partners.

In the Norton Radstock Area there is a need to integrate all the different agencies working with young homeless people into one centre. A Youth Foyer in the Norton-Radstock Area (similar to the YMCA Foyer in Frome) providing supported living accommodation (13 beds) and a one stop shop for young people would be one solution. This would integrate all the agencies serving young people in Norton Radstock (connexions, project 28, YMCA, Off the Record, On the Level) on one shared premises which could also provide training opportunities through Norton Radstock College¹⁶ and health advice. The shared use of premises would mean services could be delivered more efficiently at one location which will reduce cost and will benefit the service users. The YMCA run a similar foyer scheme in Frome which has been a great success. The shared use of premises reduces costs as each agency occupying the premises makes a contribution.

Many of the local agencies have expressed an interest in being involved with a foyer scheme. The Police have also expressed their support for a drop in service in the Norton-Radstock Area and so has the Senior Youth Worker for the area.

Foyers are unique in offering an entirely holistic service to young homeless people primarily aged 16-25. In addition to accommodation, residents have access to a wide range of training and educational opportunities as well as one-to-one advice, guidance and support to enable them to undertake the personal development required to make the transition from dependence to independence.¹⁷

Foyers are funded in a huge variety of different ways. The most popular is via partnerships with local Housing Associations, colleges, and businesses. European funding also plays a part with Foyers bidding successfully for SRB, ESF and ERDF funds. Certain projects in Foyers are also funded by mainstream Government money (e.g. the UK Online centres, Basic Skills agency grant, ACLF).¹⁸

The Task and Finish Group also notes that Local Authorities are developing Youth Homelessness Strategies in order to deal with the problem of youth homelessness and implement joint working. This would seem to be an urgent priority for B&NES.

¹⁶ Barbara Chambers at Norton Radstock College is supportive of this.

¹⁷ <http://www.foyer.net/mpn/story.php?sid=48>

¹⁸ http://www.foyer.net/mpn/faq.php?myfaq=1&id_cat=2&categories=Funding

Case Study – Youth Homelessness Strategy- Brighton and Hove¹⁹

In 2005 the Brighton and Hove Housing Strategy Division began working closely with the Children and Young's People Trust on complementary strategies to prevent children from becoming looked-after. In developing strategies to support family sustainability it became clear that there was a need for:

- a strategic approach to prevent family breakdown, and
- an improvement in the network of solutions available to young people if families did break down, or if respite were needed.

A Youth Homelessness Working Group was set up which sponsored a smaller strategy group of 5 people tasked with developing a Youth Homelessness Strategy. The strategy group's first task was to undertake a needs analysis.

A conference was held in July 2006 to consider feedback from the needs analysis and to engage stakeholders in practical activity to developing advice, housing and support pathways for vulnerable young people (offenders, teenage parents, substance misusers and those evicted from the family home).

Following this, an Action Plan was prepared to put in place the agreed strategy. A Youth Homelessness Strategy was prepared, which is being monitored by the Youth Homelessness Working Group.

In January 2007 a performance framework was agreed which is being monitored by the Group, and headlines of which are reported through the Council and the Children and Young People Trust structures to elected members and the Board, respectively.

Services are being re-focused and co-ordinated to achieve optimum outcomes for young people:

- 'Families and Young People's Housing Options Team' including 3 specialist young people's Housing Options Officers has been established within the Council establishment. These officers provide their service from the Youth Advice Centre, run by a youth homelessness partner organisation, not the Council's homelessness reception. All 16 and 17 year olds and their families are seen by one of these officers,

¹⁹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/strategy/beingstrategic/changingpriorities/casestudy2/>

focusing knowledge of the individuals and of relevant services in an encouraging environment.

- Series of stakeholder events and subgroups is developing priority actions around early intervention, accommodation options and care pathways, to develop a wide ranging strategy to tackle youth homelessness.
- An integrated support pathway is taking shape on the ground to which Supporting People commissioning is integral. This pathway of resettlement services challenges each young person to make life changes, fulfil their potential and become contributing members of the community. Work and Learning is firmly embedded into the resettlement process.
- There is a multi-agency protocol to prevent evictions of young people from supported housing.
- The Council has seen a reduction in the number of young homeless acceptances with levels of youth homelessness falling below the national average for the first time.
- Effort to reach young people in schools has been switched to work with education professionals, providing training and information to enable them to identify young people at risk of homelessness and to put them in touch with advisers.
- A pilot scheme is under way to prepare young people in supported housing for independent housing in the private sector, and to establish partnerships with private sector landlords.
- There are plans to identify a quota of beds in the supported accommodation pathway to provide short-stay accommodation and support for young people in family crisis, to provide respite and a period for work with the young person and their family.
- There are plans to shift the focus towards a 'family solutions' model by working with the 'whole family' rather than just the young person to prevent families from breaking down rather than simply dealing with the after-effects.

As a result of the consultative approach:

- all stakeholders are now much more aware of the value and effectiveness of the new service focus on early intervention which was the original requirement.

There is now strong collaboration amongst partner organisations who provide advice

and supported housing to tackle youth homelessness.

Case Study – Youth Foyer²⁰

Yeovil Foyer and Youth Health Guidance Service

The following table demonstrates the need for partnerships between Foyers and local health agencies:

A young man had been living at Yeovil Foyer for several months and it was clear that there were some mental health issues. His life was chaotic and his depression and anxiety made it impossible for him to hold down a job. His key worker spoke to him about seeing his doctor to sign him off sick, change his benefit, and therefore take pressure off and enable him to access the mental health team for psychiatric help.

It took a month to get an appointment with the GP, because it was seen as non-urgent, and even when the GP saw him she said she could not sign the sick note until his file (which had not even been requested yet) arrived from his previous doctor. He had been registered with this doctor for three months. She would not refer him or prescribe anything without reading these notes.

Three sick notes later his mental health had deteriorated badly and he attacked another resident, was arrested and bailed away from the Foyer. Then he became homeless, and the mental health team then became involved - all too late. Jasmine Riches, who works at the Foyer, says, "I strongly believe that if he had received the help he had been crying out for (and I mean really crying down the phone at his doctor) he would be receiving the right treatment and would possibly still be at the Foyer."

As a small rural Foyer, Yeovil Foyer works proactively with other local organisations to provide user-friendly access to health information and advice through the multi-agency Youth Health Guidance Service, in the setting up of which the Foyer has had a key role.

Thanks to support from the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, the Foyer's coffee shop area is now being used as a drop-in base for workers and young people, thus providing a non-

²⁰ <http://www.foyer.net/mpn/topic.php?topic=44>

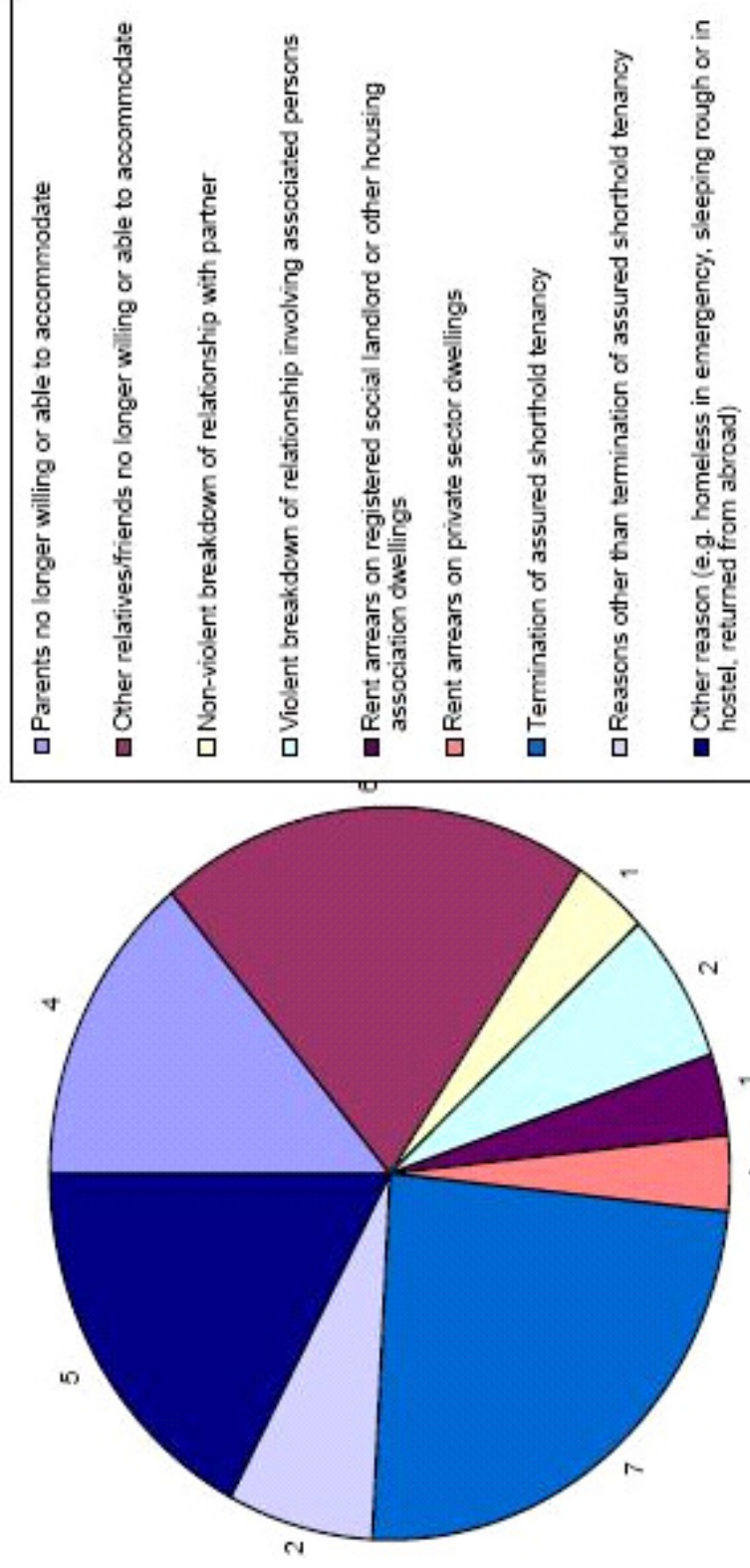
threatening environment where young people can come to obtain information or discuss problems. By introducing young people to services in this way, their confidence will be developed so that they learn how to access this kind of service later.

7. Task Group Recommendations:

- 1) B&NES commissions further research in order to analyse the extent of the problem in the Norton Radstock area.
- 2) B&NES setup a working group to establish a Youth Homeless Strategy to examine the situation in both Urban and Rural area across the whole of Bath and North East Somerset.
- 3) B&NES should consider appointing a Youth Homelessness Officer to work on the development and implementation of a Youth Homelessness Strategy and co-ordinating between the Housing and Children's services and different agencies. His/her role should be piloted in the Norton Radstock Area first with the intention of expanding it across the whole of the authority.
- 4) B&NES should work with other agencies to establish a Youth Foyer in the Norton Radstock area which would provide supported accommodation and a one stop shop for homeless young people, acting as a single referral pathway thus providing an integrated more efficient service.

Appendix 1

Main reason for loss of settled home for those accepted between 1st January and 31st March 2008 (n=29)




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