

Youth homelessness policy briefing

8 September 2025

Key statistics

- Over 118,000 homeless young people in the UK
 - Nearly 9,000 care leavers aged over 18 homeless or at risk of homelessness; 10% of all care leavers
 - Three quarters of all homeless care leavers have at least one other support need; most often a mental health problem
 - At least 6,000 16 and 17 year olds homeless every year
 - Around half of older rough sleepers first homeless before age 25
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Overview

Youth homelessness has significant social and economic consequences both for individual young people and wider society. Over 118,000 young people aged 16-24 experienced homelessness in the UK in 2023-24, an increase of 10% compared to the previous financial year, and equating to 1 in 62 of all young people in the UK.¹

Young people face distinct and often overlooked challenges that put them at risk of homelessness - from family breakdown, trauma and care experience, to lower pay, reduced benefit entitlements and limited access to housing that is safe, secure, suitable and stable. All young people need a home where they can develop their independence, thrive, and experience a positive transition to adulthood.

Some groups of young people are at particular risk of homelessness including those who are care-experienced, young refugees and migrants, and those who are disabled or with long term conditions.

Around 6,500 children aged 16-17 present to their council as homeless each year in England.² The majority of these children face homelessness due to a relationship breakdown at home, whilst around one fifth are unaccompanied children seeking asylum. Worryingly [recent research from Coram](#) confirms that most of these children continue to miss out on the care and support they are legally entitled to.³

Our experience suggests these figures are just the tip of the iceberg. Beyond the official statistics are many more children and young people who are 'hidden homeless'. They may be sleeping on a friend's couch (commonly known as sofa surfing), or rough sleeping. Many are unaware of their rights and entitlements and aren't accessing support through their local authority.

¹ Centrepont Databank, February 2025: <https://centrepont.org.uk/ending-youth-homelessness/what-youth-homelessness/stats-and-facts>

² Homeless 16- and 17-year olds in need of care, November 2023, Children's Commissioner: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/homeless-16-and-17-year-olds-in-need-of-care/>

³ The Door Is Still Closed, December 2024, Coram: <https://www.coram.org.uk/resource/the-door-is-still-closed/>

Youth homelessness is the result of system failure. It robs young people of the chance to successfully transition into adulthood. Experience of homelessness limits children and young people's potential in all areas of their life, including educational attainment, employment prospects, relationships, and mental and physical health.⁴

Current pay and benefit systems have built-in age discrimination, which disproportionately disadvantages young people who no longer live with their families. At a time when young people are seeking to build successful independent lives, they are forced to navigate their first steps into adulthood with lower pay than older workers and fewer benefit entitlements than older claimants, yet they face the same bills and cost of living crisis as older adults.

There is also a shortage of genuinely affordable and appropriate housing for young people, including semi-independent and supported accommodation.

Around half of those rough sleeping as older adults were first homeless before the age of 25.⁵ Targeting support at young people is one of the most effective ways to prevent long-term homelessness, reduce pressure on public services, and break the cycle of insecure housing.

There is not just a moral benefit to tackling youth homelessness, but an economic one too. Centrepont have estimated that the total annual cost of youth homelessness amounts to £8.5 billion – the equivalent cost of building around 66,000 new social or affordable homes.⁶

Recommendations

To end youth homelessness, youth-specific solutions are needed, from stronger family support services, to equality in benefit entitlement and pay, and access to affordable, safe and secure housing. Targeted measures are required to address the high and increasing numbers of young care leavers finding themselves homeless, and action is needed from both central and local government to ensure homeless children aged 16 and 17 receive the care and support they are entitled to.

Here at Coram we make the following urgent recommendations:

- i) For all homeless young people
 - Government strategy and guidance on homelessness should reflect the specific issues for homeless young people and their particular vulnerabilities. As members of the #YouthHomelessChapter collective⁷, we endorse the call for the **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** to include a youth chapter in the government's

⁴ No place to stay: experiences of youth homelessness, Centrepont, 2019:

<https://centrepont.org.uk/research-reports/no-place-stay-experiences-youth-homelessness>

⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2020, quoted by New Horizons Youth Centre:

<https://nhyouthcentre.org.uk/new-generation-z-of-young-people-rough-sleeping-in-london/>

⁶ Based on Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government Policy Paper, Delivering a decade of renewal for social and affordable housing, July 2025:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-a-decade-of-renewal-for-social-and-affordable-housing/>

⁷ <https://www.planforthe136k.org.uk/learn-more>

forthcoming homelessness strategy and a youth chapter in the Homelessness Code of Guidance;⁸

- The **Department for Education** should roll out an early identification programme, such as 'Upstream'⁹ in schools for children at risk at homelessness and ensure referral to additional support services;
- The **Department for Education** and **local authorities** should increase investment in early help and prevention services. This should include evidence-based parenting, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health support, family group decision making and mediation and conflict programmes.
- **Local authorities** should develop positive accommodation and support pathways based on the Positive Pathway Framework¹⁰; with a focus on preventing young people becoming homeless and also setting out the services and support needed for those who do experience homelessness.
- Young people should not be disadvantaged financially by ensuring they have the same entitlements to pay and benefits as other adults. We support the #YouthHomelessChapter call for the **Department for Work and Pensions** to reduce the housing benefit taper rate and introduce a new Youth Independence Payment for young people living independently without family support;
- More youth-specific accommodation should be created. The **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** should consider and address young people's needs in the planning and provision of social housing and supported accommodation, and local young people should be consulted and involved in commissioning specifications for housing. This should be accompanied by investment in support to ensure that young people can maintain tenancies and thrive.

ii) For homeless care leavers

Care leavers face an increased risk of experiencing homelessness. Care-experienced young people up to age 25 are owed 'corporate parenting duties' by the local authority responsible for their care.¹¹ These duties require local authorities to support care leavers as if they were their own children, and include duties to ensure young people are safe, have stability in their home life and are prepared for adulthood and independent living. Many homeless care leavers have additional support needs, including a mental health problem, physical ill health/disability, or a learning disability. Many require additional support as they grow older, leave care and move on to live more independently.¹²

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

⁹ <https://www.roundabouthomeless.org/who-we-are/homeless-prevention/upstream-england/>

¹⁰ Positive Pathway Framework, St Basils: <https://stbasils.org.uk/about-us/the-positive-pathway/>

¹¹ Corporate Parenting Duties are set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017

¹² [Statutory homelessness England: Support needs dashboard 2022-24](#)

Despite this, 1 in 10 care leavers face homelessness or a risk of homelessness, due to gaps in the support they receive after leaving care, and government data shows a sharp increase in recent years.¹³

Care leavers face systemic barriers to accessing suitable housing and support services. Care leavers are subject to a local connection test for homelessness support and lose 'priority need' status when they turn 21. They also face a post code lottery in relation to local authority social housing allocation policies, which means their priority on social housing waiting lists will depend on where they wish to live.

According to official statistics 6% of care leavers live in unsuitable accommodation¹⁴, yet in our surveys 31% of care leavers feel that where they live is not right for them. In addition, more than a third don't always feel safe and almost half don't always feel settled where they live¹⁵.

Recommendations

- The **Department for Work and Pensions** should give care leavers entitlement to the over-25 rate of Universal Credit from the age of 18;
- **The Department for Work and Pensions** should extend the exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate for care leavers from age 25 to 35, to align with the age threshold at which the Shared Accommodation Rate applies.
- The **Department for Education** should create a national offer for care leavers that is mirrored in care leaver local offers to provide all care leavers with council tax exemptions, rent deposit and rent guarantor schemes (at present eligibility to these provisions is varied and dependent on local policy);
- The **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** should require local authorities to give the same level of priority in their social housing allocation schemes to care leavers who have been placed in their area and wish to stay, as their own care leavers;
- Following the introduction of the care leaver exemption to the local connection test for social housing, the **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** should introduce an exemption to the local connection test that still exists in homelessness legislation under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996;
- The **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** should extend priority need status for homelessness to all care leavers irrespective age (currently limited to age 18, 19 and 20);

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>

¹⁴ [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁵ Bright Spots data 2025, Coram Voice

- The **Department for Education** should ensure all care leavers have access to independent advocacy to assist with homelessness and housing issues, no matter where they live, including non-instructed advocacy and advocacy in a language that they understand;
- Following the requirement in the Children, Wellbeing and Schools Bill that care leavers are not to be regarded as becoming homeless intentionally by local authorities, the **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** should monitor the implementation of this policy change to ensure consistency in application.

iii) For homeless children aged 16 and 17

Homeless children aged 16 and 17 are not getting the care and support they are entitled to. Local authorities are routinely failing in their legal duties to children aged between 16-17 years old who become homeless.¹⁶

Case law and statutory guidance is clear that in all but exceptional cases, a local authority should accommodate a homeless child as a 'looked-after child' under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. However, less than half of children presenting as homeless are being accommodated, and of those who are, a minority are being housed under the right legislation.

Children who have an advocate are much more likely to become 'looked after', yet most homeless 16-and 17- year-olds are navigating the complexities of the different support options on their own, without consistent advice and advocacy (and in some cases legal advice). This leaves many homeless children aged 16 and 17 to make crucial decisions alone and without adequate information, with long-term consequences for their future care and support.

National data on homeless 16- and 17-year-olds is incomplete, making it difficult to understand how well children's needs are being met and hold services to account in fulfilling their obligations in law.

Recommendations

- **Local authorities** should ensure their practice and policies are compliant with the law; and the default position is to accommodate homeless children under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 in all but exceptional cases;
- Every **local authority** should have a proactive, independent advocacy service for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. The offer should be made when the child first gets in contact for support, as well as during the Child in Need assessment;
- If a child is supported under section 17 and accommodated under housing legislation then a **local authority** must regularly review the child's placement, an independent advocate must be allocated, and they should be reminded of their right to section 20 care and the child's views and preferences clearly documented;

¹⁶ The Door Is Still Closed, Coram, 2024: <https://www.coram.org.uk/resource/the-door-is-still-closed/>

- The **Department for Education and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government** should collect and publish local authority level data on the number of 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, are assessed, and become looked after;
- **Local authorities** should record data on how many children presenting as homeless are offered advocacy, how many take up the offer, and outcomes for those children.

About Us

One of the charities within the Coram Group, Coram Voice offers support and information for children and young people in care, on the edge of care and care leavers, and has an extensive track record of both supporting and advocating for individual young people to ensure they secure the housing they need, as well as making the case for better policy and practice. You can find out more about the work of Coram Voice [here](#).

Coram's Voices in Action Ambassadors are 16–25-year-olds with personal experience of homelessness. They campaign locally and nationally to change policy and practice and empower their peers with knowledge of their rights through workshop delivery and content creation. Find out more about Voices in Action [here](#).

To find out more or if you have any queries about this briefing, please contact Louise Mumcular, Youth Homelessness Policy and Practice Officer, Voices in Action: Louise.Mumcular@coram.org.uk