Community Foundation serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland

Youth Homelessness Initiative

A Review of Local Authority Homelessness Strategies and Youth Homelessness in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear

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Foreword

In October, the Community Foundation agreed to facilitate an initiative in Tyne & Wear and Northumberland, whose aim would be "to ensure that no young person in the sub region need be homeless by 2005". An ambitious five year project but an achievable one. Many voluntary sector agencies signed up to delivering the aim and a Network was established, which has grown throughout the four years of the Initiative's life. A Steering Group, comprising representatives from key voluntary sector agencies and the local authorities, was charged with the task of progressing the work. The Initiative is funded by grants from John Laing plc and Northern Rock plc, to whom we are grateful.

In the early stages of the Initiative - which became known as the Youth Homelessness Initiative (YHI) - commissioned the Community Safety Research Unit at Northumbria University to undertake an information gathering exercise, to establish the nature and extent of strategic planning in relation to youth homelessness in Tyne & Wear and Northumberland. The Report, which GO-NE said "told the story which needed telling" revealed little co-ordinated strategic planning within or across the local authority areas of the sub region and recommended that, if the initiative's aim was to be achieved, there was a clear need for a sub regional strategy, with a separate strategy in the districts of rural Northumberland, because of the particular and different issues to be addressed in rural areas.

In February 2003, the Homelessness Act required local authorities, for the first time, to put in place homelessness strategies by July of that same year. On the back of this, the YHI agreed to do two things. Firstly, to develop our own strategy for addressing youth homelessness and to send it to all local authorities in Tyne & Wear and Northumberland in good time for them to take into account in writing their first homelessness strategies. Secondly, to undertake a campaign with the Evening Chronicle, drawing attention to different aspects of youth homelessness and the work being undertaken in the sub region with homeless young people, in the three month period prior to the local authority strategies being written. Additionally, realising the importance of preventive work, the YHI began a piece of work with Connexions Tyne & Wear, which aimed to include the issue of youth homelessness in the curriculum for all 14 - 16 year olds.

We also planned to undertake an independent review of the local authority homelessness strategies and we are indebted to GO-NE for making them available to us. The CSRU at Northumbria University were once again commissioned to undertake this work for us and their findings are both the content of this Report and will provide the agenda for work in the final year of the Initiative. What is now clear is that, if the aim is to be achieved, it will require the collaboration and co-operation of all statutory and voluntary agencies involved in the field of youth homelessness across Tyne & Wear and Northumberland.

Mike Worthington
Deputy Chair Community Foundation
Chair Youth Homelessness Initiative
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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those individuals who have contributed to this review, especially those who gave freely and generously of their time. This includes all of the Local Authority representatives interviewed. We would also like to thank North Tyneside, Berwick and Gateshead council staff for providing relevant documentation on request. Finally, we would like to thank members of the Youth Homelessness Initiative (YHI) steering group and members of the Community Foundation for their support during the writing of this review, particularly Mike Worthington OBE and Carol Botten.
Executive Summary

Following the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities are required to conduct a review of homelessness in their area and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy. Each of the six district authorities in Northumberland (Alnwick, Berwick, Blyth, Morpeth, Tynedale and Wansbeck) and the five local authorities in Tyne and Wear (Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland) has complied with these requirements. This report, the purpose of which is to review and describe how youth homelessness is addressed within this strategy documentation, has been written by members of Northumbria University’s Community Safety Research Unit and was commissioned by the Community Foundation’s Youth Homelessness Initiative (YHI). In order to ensure local relevance, the YHI stipulated that the report should assess each local authority strategy against five thematic areas: involving and consulting young people; prevention; developing a tailored approach to rural youth homelessness; support for young people who have been homeless; and inter-agency working. The key findings reported are that:

- None of the eleven local authorities produced a separate youth homelessness strategy. Discussion of youth homelessness is contained within overarching homelessness strategies produced by each local authority.

- Only one local authority consulted young homeless people directly before developing their homelessness strategy. The outcome of stakeholder consultation was more pronounced within each of the strategies produced.

- Few strategies refer to existing national studies on young people and youth homelessness. Additionally, there is little discussion of specific underpinning factors and underlying issues leading to youth homelessness. Often such factors and issues are presented as relating to homelessness generally and few are detailed as young person specific.

- There is wide variation in the range and type of preventative work identified and described. Many Tyne and Wear local authority strategies detail objectives that include discussion of the means and practices by which the prevention of homelessness is or will be achieved, including working with young people at risk of becoming homeless. A number of district authorities in Northumberland describe carrying out very limited preventative work and some do not describe carrying out any at all. A number of district authorities in the remote rural area of Northumberland are in the process of developing preventative measures. Many strategies
detail the preventative work carried out on behalf of district authorities by voluntary sector agencies and partnerships.

- Each district authority within Northumberland has developed localised responses to homelessness and these are loosely networked throughout the county. There are excellent examples of supported accommodation projects across the most rural areas that provide much needed housing and support for young people. All of the young persons housing projects within the rural area include high-level support during tenancy and the majority of projects also provide pre and post tenancy support.

- Across the five local authorities of Tyne and Wear, there are degrees of choice, diversity and variety of services provided for young people who have been homeless. In contrast, across the six district authorities in Northumberland, there is limited choice, diversity and variation in services provided for young people who have been homeless.

- There is overwhelmingly a client centred approach underpinning the various reviews and strategies developed and devised in Tyne and Wear. In Northumberland there is generally a client-centred approach but it is often difficult to identify young people as a specific group within the overall client group described in the various reviews and strategies produced.

- Inter-agency, multi-agency and partnership working has developed across all local authority areas within Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. Some local authority strategies continue to highlight the need to further develop an interagency approach to homelessness. In a number of areas, an inter-agency approach has developed beyond operational practice and service delivery to securing links at strategic levels.

- There are a number of protocols with a variety of agencies developed or being developed within and across the sub region. The aim of such protocols is to provide clarity and to ensure the joint delivery of services across specific areas and in respect of specific activities.

The review involved desktop analysis of relevant documentation (local authority homelessness reviews and strategies) and interviews with individuals responsible for strategy production in each local authority area. The review was carried out during 2004.

Table 1 provides contextual information relating to each local authority area in the sub-region of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. Tables 2 and 3 summarise the main findings of the review against the criteria laid down by the YHI.
Table 1. Local Authority Profile

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1 This information was obtained from the Neighbourhood Statistics website [http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk](http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk) and provides the results from the 2001 Census.

2 The percentages included in the category’s under 16 years of age, 16-19 years of age, and 20-29 years of age are the taken from each specific Local Authority Area total population percentage. For example Alnwick total population is 31,029, and of this 18.1% are under the age of 16.

3 Tynedale and Sunderland stock figures combine all social rented housing under RSL ownership due to stock transfer.

4 Figures under RSL and council stock entries are based on households and therefore do not include for empty properties.

5 Tynedale and Sunderland stock figures combine all social rented housing under RSL ownership due to stock transfer.

6 Figures under RSL and council stock entries are based on households and therefore do not include for empty properties.
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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of Consultation</th>
<th>Prevention</th>
<th>Developing a tailored approach to rural youth homelessness</th>
<th>Support for young people who have been homeless</th>
<th>Interagency approach</th>
<th>Good practice</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tynedale</td>
<td>No direct Consultation but detailed consultation with voluntary sector - Links</td>
<td>Acknowledged role of mediation and plans to develop further with regard to young people</td>
<td>Supported localised response to youth homelessness. Homelessness monitoring system effective and reliable.</td>
<td>Developing sub strategy to address support needs of groups including young people</td>
<td>Multi agency steering group. Signed up to Social Services joint protocol</td>
<td>Links Housing Project, Young Persons Strategy. Consultation via voluntary sector. Joint protocol with Social services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alnwick</td>
<td>No direct consultation</td>
<td>Mediation recognised but not specific to young people</td>
<td>Supported localised response to youth homelessness. Issues around data.</td>
<td>Supported Voluntary Sector housing project</td>
<td>Multi agency forum to monitor strategy. Signed up to Social Services joint protocol</td>
<td>Gallery Project. Joint protocol with Social services.</td>
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<td>Berwick-upon-Tweed</td>
<td>No direct consultation</td>
<td>Aiming to develop a mediation service</td>
<td>Supported localised response to youth homelessness. Issues around data.</td>
<td>Supported Voluntary Sector housing project</td>
<td>Signed up to joint protocol with Social Services</td>
<td>Quay Steps project. and Beehive project. Joint protocol with Social services.</td>
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<td>Morpeth</td>
<td>No direct consultation</td>
<td>Identifies need for support. Aim to work with Connexions</td>
<td>Supported localised response to youth homelessness. Issues around data.</td>
<td>Supported Voluntary Sector housing project</td>
<td>Plan to develop a young persons strategic plan. Signed up to joint protocol with Social Services</td>
<td>Barnabas homeless support project. Joint protocol with Social services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wansbeck</td>
<td>Limited direct consultation with young people</td>
<td>Aim to work with youth services. Operate a young persons family mediation service</td>
<td>Supported localised response to youth homelessness.</td>
<td>Acknowledges need for further development of support services</td>
<td>Currently working with a number of agencies. Signed up to joint protocol with Social Services</td>
<td>What now booklet. Northumberland Castles Project. Barnardos supported lodgings scheme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blyth</td>
<td>Limited direct consultation but do identify young people as a specific group</td>
<td>Number of future developments aimed at young homeless people Recognises importance of mediation</td>
<td>Supported localised response to youth homelessness. Issues around data</td>
<td>Support offered in relation to development of independent living skills</td>
<td>Number of partner agencies involved in housing and housing advice</td>
<td>Relationship/sessions with schools. The Point project. Hayloft project. Joint protocol with Social Services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Authority</td>
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<td>Prevention</td>
<td>Support for young people who have been homeless</td>
<td>Interagency Approach</td>
<td>Good Practice</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunderland</td>
<td>Limited direct consultation- but have developed a young person’s homelessness group.</td>
<td>Aim to raise awareness via schools. Family mediation recognised as a key issue.</td>
<td>Landlord accreditation scheme.</td>
<td>Homelessness strategy links with a number of other strategies. Key actions emphasises joint working with other agencies.</td>
<td>Landlord accreditation scheme. Awareness raising-posters/leaflets. Free phone service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Shields</td>
<td>Limited direct consultation with young people</td>
<td>Are some support services for young people in existence and expansion planned.</td>
<td>Plan to expand support to include this group</td>
<td>Multi agency approach involving all key partners.</td>
<td>Young persons Accommodation strategy group. Joint protocol.</td>
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</table>

7 Developing a tailored approach to rural youth homelessness is not a thematic area relevant to Local Authorities in Tyne and Wear.
Good Practice

The issue of what constitutes ‘good practice’ is a thorny one. Despite guidance on good practice in strategy development, what constitutes good practice in one area of Northumberland and/or Tyne and Wear may constitute basic practice in another area, not least because of the resources available in particular local areas. As detailed in Tables 2 and 3, ‘good practice’ examples can be identified from activity across the sub region and in relation to the five thematic areas detailed by the YHI. That stated, examples of good practice described in this report are not necessarily exhaustive of the good work that may be operating in each local authority area. This report deliberately presents a range of examples in order to highlight the work going on across each of the eleven local authorities of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. Illustration of good practice broken down by the five thematic areas detailed in the YHI strategy are as follows:

Involving and consulting young people

- Newcastle City Council’s:
  - Approach to engagement, involvement and consultation with young people.
  - Young Peoples Forum.
  - Joint assessment work between Homelessness Officers and Social Workers.
- Gateshead City Council’s three-year research project entitled ‘Tackling youth homelessness in Gateshead: beyond a youth homelessness strategy’.
- Tynedale District Council’s approach to securing the views and needs of young people via an independent agency involved in working with young people.

Prevention

- Blyth Valley District Authority’s:
  - Development of a relationship with local schools.
  - The Point (Blyth).
- Gateshead City Council’s preventive work with young people, through schools.
- Newcastle City Council’s range of resettlement services.
- North Tyneside Council’s evidence based approach to the prevention of youth homelessness.
- Sunderland City Council’s awareness raising.
- Wansbeck district council’s:
  - Work with NECCA and Sunderland Housing Group to provide supported accommodation to drug users who are in treatment.
- General:
  - Homeless Action Project - providing support to young people between the ages of 16 and 25 in South East Northumberland.

Developing a tailored approach to rural youth homelessness
General:
- Barnardos supported lodgings project in Wansbeck.
- Berwick Youth Project.
- Byker Bridge Housing Association.
- Hayloft.
- Links Housing Project.
- Northumberland Castles.
- The Barnabas Project.
- The Gallery Project.

Developing support for young people who have been homeless
- North Tyneside Council’s range of support services for young people.
- Sunderland City Council’s landlord and accreditation scheme for young people.
- Gateshead City Council’s letting support workers scheme.

Inter-agency approach
- Gateshead City Council’s development of a Homelessness Forum, Gateshead Action on Homelessness.
- Newcastle City Council’s:
  - Instrumental work in setting up the Tyne and Wear Homeless Officer Group in 2000.
- North Tyneside Council’s:
  - Establishment of a homelessness multi agency steering group.

Areas for Improvement

Areas for improvement highlighted by the review process fall into two categories.

- The need for a sub-regional approach. The review confirms findings of an earlier study undertaken by the CSRU for the YHI that there is support for a sub-regional approach to tackling youth homelessness across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

- Criteria specific areas for improvement. The review has provided for the identification of specific areas for improvement against each of the five thematic areas detailed by the YHI. These areas for improvement are detailed below:

In order to ensure that homelessness strategies reflect the needs of young people it is essential that Local Authorities:
- Establish effective, participatory and empowering methodologies for consulting young people.
- Ensure that consultation is as wide and as appropriate as possible and draws upon a variety of methods and involves a range of young people. Consultation methods may include individual interviews, workshops, surveys, and focus groups and should aim to involve young people from a variety of backgrounds and situations.
Utilise existing networks where appropriate and where resources are tight to deliver consultation.

Ensure that consultation encourages feedback to enable the maximum and most effective participation possible.

Ensure that adequate training in consultative methodology is provided where appropriate.

Explore the possibility of establishing young person’s fora and developing a young person’s homelessness strategy.

In order to ensure that the homelessness strategies are orientated and focused towards prevention it is essential that Local Authorities:

- Research the individual causes and characteristics of youth homelessness in their local area on an iterative basis.
- Ensure that findings of research are shared between different Local Authority departments and between neighbouring local authorities.
- Ensure that the homelessness issues highlighted within such research are incorporated into other Local authority strategies as appropriate.
- Develop training with local schools and youth projects on issues relating to homelessness and publicise these in the community.
- Develop family mediation services specifically targeting young person/parent relationship break down.
- Provide debt/welfare benefit advice to those young people threatened with homelessness in addition to those who are actually homeless and those who have been rehoused.
- Develop specialist support for young people especially for those with mental health/drug/alcohol problems and for those who have experienced physical and or sexual abuse.

In order to ensure that homelessness strategies address rural issues where appropriate, rural Local authorities should:

- Formalise the collection and recording of data using a consistent pro forma both within and between rural Local Authorities, and other relevant departments and agencies.
- Continue to petition for increased allocations to provide appropriate accommodation and support across the rural area as the need is identified.
- Provide direct access accommodation.
- Develop multi tenure support packages for young people.
- Develop support for young people with mental health/drug/alcohol problems and those who have suffered from physical and sexual abuse.
- Develop inter district provision and support to enable more cost effective and specialist provision.

In order to ensure that homelessness strategies reflect the needs of young people who have been homeless Local Authorities should:

- Develop appropriate provision using the information obtained from the research into causes of homelessness.
- Develop resettlement packages with other agencies and or departments.
- Carry out independent living skills training via schools, youth projects and other appropriate agencies.
In order to ensure that the homelessness strategies are relevant and related across relevant departmental, organisational and agency strategies Local Authorities should:

- Develop an inter agency steering group including representatives from as many relevant departments, organisations and agencies as appropriate.
- Agree joint protocols between Local Authority departments and between the Local authority and voluntary agencies operating in the area.
- Develop sub groups to progress individual topics/issues.
- Develop sub regional and regional steering groups to share best practice and to raise awareness of issues and trends.

**Other Reading Relevant to this Review**

Francis, P. Alvey, S. Clark, A. Dolman, F. (2002) *Youth Homelessness Strategy in Northumberland and Tyne And Wear: A Review Of The Documentary Evidence* Northumbria University, Community Safety Research Unit
1. Background

‘Across the final quarter of the twentieth century, governments thus reconstructed youth in fundamental ways. The new state of youth that emerged from this, in many respects, reconstructed the condition of being young into a much more costly ‘state’ to be. For sure, for a notable minority, these changes opened up the possibility of obtaining benefits and rewards that were perhaps previously unimaginable. … For many more, however, the price of this changing state of youth has been a considerable one, as large numbers of young people contemplate their lives from a position of hardship and austerity, unemployment, insecure and part-time working, protracted dependence on their families, insecurity, a marked intensification of their lives at school and in work, the institutionalisation of low wages and significant increases to the costs involved in securing some reasonable degree of independent living. From their perspective, the conditions of being young has become a much more arduous state to be’. 8

While there is evidence to suggest that over the last four decades there has been a fundamental change to what it means to be young, one consequence of which is a protracted dependence on family 9, leaving home for the majority of young people remains a natural transition to independence. However, young people often receive little help and face many obstacles when leaving home, particularly in finding accommodation.

Low income, unemployment and limited support mechanisms are three major factors that limit young people’s access to accommodation and can cause severe problems. Restrictions in levels of Income Support and Housing Benefit for under 25 year olds, and the lack of entitlement to Income Support for most 16 and 17 year olds, for example, contribute to increased insecurity, risk and vulnerability. One, but not the only consequence of these factors, is an increase in the number of young people who are homeless across England and Wales.

A common misconception is that all young homeless people choose to become homeless. However, research indicates that many homeless young people leave home because they are forced to. Furthermore, research has evidenced that young people in rural areas tolerate situations at home that their urban counterparts would not. This is due to the lack of alternative options or choices for them. For example, young homeless people often face difficulties in finding suitable hostel accommodation.

The aim of New Labour’s approach to housing and homelessness is to coordinate and provide a range of integrated services. This involves joining

up previously fragmented services and filling gaps where appropriate services do not currently exist. The Government has recognised that its strategy requires a step change in the relationship between local and national government and the charitable and voluntary sectors and that this change needs to be managed if it is to be successful\textsuperscript{10}.

The Youth Homelessness Initiative

The Youth Homelessness Initiative (YHI) was launched in 2000. The overall aim of the YHI is to ensure that ‘no young person in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear need be homeless by the year 2005’. The specific aims of the YHI approach to reducing youth homelessness are detailed in Box 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1. YHI Aims</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To develop strategic joined-up thinking across the sub region with the aim of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Coordinating the planning and delivery of services in future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Developing a strategic approach of how to link together</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Getting local authorities to talk to one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To work towards:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Making better use of existing provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identifying and flagging up gaps in provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Developing an agenda for preventative work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To begin by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Examining existing strategic plans on homelessness across the sub-region, in both public and voluntary sectors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The YHI is facilitated and chaired by the Community Foundation and funded by Laing Construction and Northern Rock. It is particularly committed to encouraging cooperation and coordination at local and sub regional levels. Consequently, the YHI has organised, since its inception, regular forum meetings with representation from all statutory and voluntary sector organisations across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear who provide services for young homeless people. YHI works with GO-NE, the North East Housing Forum, local authorities, Connexions, young people, housing and support providers. The YHI is managed by a steering group comprising representatives from the voluntary sector and one senior officer representing the five local authorities in Tyne and Wear. Both the forum meetings and the steering group are chaired and administered by the Community Foundation.

Basing its approach on good practice guidance from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (OPDM), alongside ‘good practice’ examples from across the sub-region, YHI is committed to working with the six district authorities in Northumberland (Alnwick, Berwick, Blyth, Morpeth, Tynedale and Wansbeck) and the five local authorities in Tyne and Wear (Gateshead, Newcastle, North

\textsuperscript{10} For example see the work of the DETR, the SEU and the Rough Sleepers Unit
Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland) to address five substantive themes, and their constituent sub-themes. These are detailed in Box 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2. YHI Strategy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Involving and consulting young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consultation with young people should be embedded in strategic development and not be one-off or static</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Young people should be involved in service delivery development at all levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Best use of existing studies and consultations with young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness raising – understanding underlying issues leading to homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifying and working with young people at risk of becoming homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The role of schools and youth services, Connexions and other agencies in identifying and preventing homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education and awareness raising for young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dealing with family breakdown, family mediation and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Specialist support and advice for young people who have experienced physical, sexual or mental abuse or for young people with drug, alcohol or mental health problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low income and debt management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Developing a tailored approach to rural youth homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collection of data from all relevant sources in a consistent and regular format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Publicity informing young people of their opportunities under the new Homelessness legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supplying small, localised responses networked throughout the County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provision of flexible support including pre and post tenancy input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education and awareness rising for young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Support for young people who have been homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Choice, diversity and variety of services provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resettlement support, tenancy sustainment and independent living skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A client centred approach, focussing on the needs of young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. An inter-agency approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inter-agency approach, working with Social Services Departments, Housing Departments, Youth Offending Teams, Police, Health Authorities, Connexions, Voluntary Organisations, and Others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Agreed protocols across agencies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Reviewing Local Authority Homelessness Strategies

In order to inform its commitment to working in partnership with local authorities and voluntary and charitable organisations to reduce the nature and extent of youth homelessness over the period 2000/05, in 2001 the YHI commissioned the Community Safety Research Unit (CSRU) at Northumbria University to review existing strategic plans on youth homelessness across local authorities in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

The CSRU report\(^1\), submitted to the YHI in 2002, identified examples of ‘good’ practice alongside examples of under-development, and concluded that, if the aim of the YHI was to be realised, and in order to facilitate and coordinate the planning and delivery of services in the future, there was a need to establish a Northumberland and Tyne and Wear sub regional strategy on youth homelessness.

In December 2003, and following the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002 which requires local authorities to conduct a review of homelessness in their area and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy, the YHI commissioned the CSRU to review how youth homelessness is addressed within the strategy documentation produced by the eleven local authorities of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. As the minutes of the YHI Steering Group meeting that commissioned the follow up review detail:

> It was agreed that a[n] … in depth analysis of the LA strategy documents against our youth homelessness strategy is required. It was agreed that we go back to the Community Safety Research Unit at Northumbria University to ask them to carry out this analysis and report back in Feb/March 2004.

> This analysis must cover what their strategies address against what we identified in our strategy document as the major areas of work/issues’.

As the minutes identify, in order to ensure local relevance, the YHI stipulated that the review should assess each strategy against the five thematic areas identified by the YHI in its own strategy document. These were presented in Box 1 and covered five areas:

- Involving and consulting young people
- Prevention
- Developing a tailored approach to rural youth homelessness
- Support for young people who have been homeless
- Inter-agency working.

\(^{1}\) Francis, P. Alvey, S. Clark, A. Dolman, F. (2002) Youth Homelessness Strategy in Northumberland and Tyne And Wear: A Review Of The Documentary Evidence Northumbria University, Community Safety Research Unit.
In addition, the minutes of the YHI Steering Group also detail that the review should:

- ‘Identify the key questions and critical issues that we want to discuss with all the LAs about their approach to tackling youth homelessness in relation to us achieving our aim.
- Look at whether any of the strategies …[address]… cross-area working. It is obvious that each of the LA strategies cover their area but the first piece of research identified that in order to be successful there must be a sub-regional approach with LAs working together. Do any of the homelessness strategies acknowledge this or identify ways that this can happen?’

The review involved desktop analysis of relevant documentation (local authority homelessness reviews and strategies) and interviews with key stakeholders responsible for its production in each local authority area. Justification for a desk top analysis included the short time scale involved combined with the level of funding available. The purpose of each interview was to:

- Explore the process of strategy development and production within each local authority area.
- Address queries identified by the research team in their review of the strategy documentation.
- Clarify and verifying the specific content of strategic documentation
- Provide local authorities with a forum within which they could further explain approach to youth homelessness.
- Identify evidence based practice and examples of developing and/or good practice

The interviews were carried out during May, June and July 2004. Box 3 identifies those interviewed as part of this research, together with details of the date of the meeting and time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris Brinton</td>
<td>Tynedale District Council</td>
<td>17.05.04</td>
<td>2.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy Clark</td>
<td>Blyth District Council</td>
<td>18.05.04</td>
<td>10.00am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Anne Pollock</td>
<td>Alnwick District Council</td>
<td>18.05.04</td>
<td>12.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Lord</td>
<td>Berwick Upon Tweed</td>
<td>20.05.04</td>
<td>11.00am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeannie Macmillan</td>
<td>Wansbeck District Council</td>
<td>21.05.04</td>
<td>2.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Paul Millburn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neal Munslow</td>
<td>Newcastle City Council</td>
<td>26.05.04</td>
<td>2.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Brough and Steve Hamilton</td>
<td>South Shields</td>
<td>02.06.04</td>
<td>1.30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Fisher Jim Moffet</td>
<td>Sunderland City Council</td>
<td>03.06.04</td>
<td>2.00pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The documentation produced by the five local authorities in Tyne and Wear and the six district authorities in Northumberland was also assessed against the guidance laid down by the DTLR to assist local housing authorities in addressing and reviewing homelessness in local authority areas and in formulating and publishing a homelessness strategy. A brief review of the 'headlines' associated with this guidance are detailed in Box 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clare Forrester</td>
<td>Gateshead MBC</td>
<td>08.06.04</td>
<td>11.00am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison Davies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine Cross</td>
<td>Neil Tryner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Bell</td>
<td>North Tyneside Council</td>
<td>30.06.04</td>
<td>10.30am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Slaughter</td>
<td>Morpeth County Council</td>
<td>07.07.04</td>
<td>10.30am</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 4. Guidance on Review and Strategy Development and Publication

Housing Authorities are required to:
- Carry out a review of homelessness in their area
- Formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review
- Keep the strategy under review
- Consult other local or public authorities, or voluntary organizations before adopting or modifying the strategy

Homelessness reviews must consider:
- The levels and likely future levels of homelessness
- The activities and services provided which help to prevent homelessness, help to find accommodation for homeless people and potentially homeless people, or provide support for them including support to prevent them from becoming homeless again
- The resources available to the authority and to social services, other public authorities, voluntary organizations and other agencies for providing these services

Homeless strategies must include plans for:
- The prevention of homelessness
- Ensuring there is significant accommodation available for people who are, or who may become homeless
- Ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again

The strategy must therefore also include:
- All homeless people, including those who would not be considered to be in priority need for accommodation
- All people at risk of becoming homeless, whether within 28 days or a longer period
- People who might have become homeless intentionally
- Homeless people in the area who might not have a local connection

The findings reported in this review are based upon the desk top analysis of the eleven strategy documents and supporting materials, interviews with key stakeholders involved in the production of the strategy documents and analysis of government publications and relevant other documentation.

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12 Taken from Boxes 1.1-1.4, Section 1.2 in Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook (2002) London: DTLR
3. Homelessness Strategies in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear

The key findings of this review are that:

- None of the eleven local authorities produced a separate youth homelessness strategy. Discussion of youth homelessness is contained within overarching homelessness strategies produced by each local authority.

- Only one local authority consulted young homeless people directly before developing their homelessness strategy. The outcome of stakeholder consultation was more pronounced within each of the strategies produced.

- Few strategies refer to existing national studies on young people and youth homelessness. Additionally, there is little discussion of specific underpinning factors and underlying issues leading to youth homelessness. Often such factors and issues are presented as relating to homelessness generally and few are detailed as young person specific.

- There is wide variation in the range and type of preventative work identified and described. Many Tyne and Wear local authority strategies detail objectives that include discussion of the means and practices by which the prevention of homelessness is or will be achieved, including working with young people at risk of becoming homeless. A number of district authorities in Northumberland describe carrying out very limited preventative work and some do not describe carrying out any at all. A number of district authorities in the remote rural area of Northumberland are in the process of developing preventative measures. Many strategies detail the preventative work carried out on behalf of district authorities by voluntary sector agencies and partnerships.

- Each district authority within Northumberland has developed localised responses to homelessness and these are loosely networked throughout the county. There are excellent examples of supported accommodation projects across the most rural areas that provide much needed housing and support for young people. All of the young persons housing projects within the rural area include high-level support during tenancy and the majority of projects also provide pre and post tenancy support.

- Across the five local authorities of Tyne and Wear, there are degrees of choice, diversity and variety of services provided for young people who have been homeless. In contrast, across the six district authorities in Northumberland, there is limited choice, diversity and variation in services provided for young people who have been homeless.
There is overwhelmingly a client centred approach underpinning the various reviews and strategies developed and devised in Tyne and Wear. In Northumberland there is generally a client-centred approach but it is often difficult to identify young people as a specific group within the overall client group described in the various reviews and strategies produced.

Inter-agency, multi-agency and partnership working has developed across all local authority areas within Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. Some local authority strategies continue to highlight the need to further develop an interagency approach to homelessness. In a number of areas, an inter-agency approach has developed beyond operational practice and service delivery to securing links at strategic levels.

There are a number of protocols developed or being developed within and across the sub region. The aim of such protocols is to provide clarity and to ensure the joint delivery of services across specific areas and in respect of specific activities.

The purpose of this review is not only to describe current approaches to tackling youth homelessness across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear but also to identify areas for improvement and evidence of good practice. As a result, within each sub-section, action points and good practice examples are detailed.

The issue of what constitutes ‘good practice’ is a thorny one. Despite limited guidance on good practice in strategy development, what constitutes good practice in one area may constitute basic practice in another area, not least because of the resources available in particular local areas. ‘Good practice’ examples have been identified from across the sub region in relation to the five thematic areas detailed in the YHI strategy. The examples are not exhaustive of the good work of each local authority area. A range of examples has been presented in order to highlight the work going on across the sub-region of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

### 3.1 Involving and consulting young people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In order to ensure that the homelessness strategies reflect the needs of young people it is essential that Local Authorities:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establish effective, participatory and empowering methodologies for consulting young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure that consultation is as wide and as appropriate as possible and draws upon a variety of methods and a range of young people. Consultation methods may include individual interviews, workshops, surveys, and focus groups and should aim to involve young people from a variety of backgrounds and situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Utilise existing networks where appropriate and where resources are tight to deliver consultation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure that the consultation encourages feedback to enable the maximum and most effective participation possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two aspects of involving and consulting young people were explored:

- The extent to which young homeless people were consulted and the ways in which this was carried out,
- The extent to which the process of consultation with homeless young people is embedded in strategic development.

**Consultation with young people should be embedded in strategic development and not be one off or static**

Across Tyne and Wear, stakeholder consultation rather than consultation with young people appears to be the more embedded, although even in this regard some local authorities appear to be more advanced than others. While a number of local authority strategies do recognise that young people should have a say in how their housing requirements are shaped and delivered, there is little reference in them to carrying out consultation with young people as part of the existing review and strategy process. The local authorities of South Tyneside, North Tyneside and Sunderland do report consulting with homeless people, but this does not necessarily mean that they consulted with homeless young people. Only one Tyne and Wear local authority report that they carried out consultation with young people as part of the development of their homelessness strategy. This local authority is Newcastle City Council.

Newcastle carried out an extensive and thorough consultation exercise that specifically included consultation with young people. This was achieved through Newcastle Independence Network, and Inline Youth Voice. The methods used included the delivery of questionnaires and structured interviews with individual key service providers, invited written responses on services from homeless people and consultation with people who have used or are familiar with homeless services. Newcastle included within their consultation a range of secondary data including data held by a range of services, and data available through the Housing Register and Your Choice Homes (the documentation acknowledges that this data has its limitations, and the documentation also includes assessment of relevant research studies). Newcastle convened Newcastle Homelessness Forum (NHF) to oversee the review, which included representatives from all main sectors. The results from the consultation exercise reflected Newcastle’s priorities and were presented to the NHF, which then voted on their priorities. The strategy reports that the consultation results have informed the development of the strategy.

Beyond Newcastle, but still within Tyne and Wear consultation was carried out with a range of agency and organisational representatives, including voluntary, statutory, and project workers. In each of these local authorities, consultation involved carrying out case studies, interviews and questionnaire
surveys, and facilitating focus groups and workshops. In addition, each of the local authorities within Tyne and Wear organised one-day events to secure consultation with key stakeholders. Despite the use of a variety of approaches, evidence also indicates that in a number of cases there was a poor response rate from stakeholders. Documentary evidence also indicates that a number of the local authority areas relied indirectly on service providers to feedback views of young people’s experiences.

Not one of the rural district authorities consulted young homeless people directly before developing their homelessness strategies. Certainly, consultation with young people is not embedded in strategic development to any significant degree. Stakeholder consultation rather than consultation with young people again appears to be most common in rural Northumberland. In rural Northumberland, consultation was either not carried out, or carried out via a third party, usually a youth agency or project active in the area. This resulted in an uneven involvement of young people in strategy development according to the presence and activity of youth groups in particular geographical areas.

In rural Northumberland, consultation mechanisms included the delivery of case studies, focus groups, interviews, and questionnaire surveys. In addition, two local authorities organised one-day events to secure consultation with key stakeholders. During the interviews, however, a number of local authority representatives acknowledged the limitations of their strategies and recognised that young people should have a say in how their housing requirements are shaped and delivered. Some local authority representatives identified specific plans for strategic improvement, many of which focused upon involving and consulting young people in the future.

**Young people should be involved in service delivery development at all levels**

Certain local authorities across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear provide documentary evidence within their homelessness strategies that young people were consulted about future service delivery and the future development of services. However, in the majority of strategies, differentiating whether homeless young people were consulted as part of the review process or as part of service delivery development is difficult or impossible to ascertain. This is because within the documentation, the methodology and process of consultation (who, what, where, when and why) is given little or no discussion.

It is encouraging to note that South Tyneside are planning to undertake research, and that Sunderland have engaged a consultant to undertake research on the local authority’s behalf. In November 2003 Centrepoint published its first interim report of a three-year study entitled, ‘Tackling youth
homelessness in Gateshead: Beyond a youth homelessness strategy\textsuperscript{13}. It is claimed that this research will be used to feed into a planned review of Gateshead’s current strategy. Furthermore a number of Homelessness Forums are operating within Tyne and Wear, although these do not specifically focus upon young people. Sunderland held focus groups to consult on the development of their strategy and young people were included within these groups. Representatives from a youth project were also invited to participate in the Homelessness Forum. Newcastle stand out in this regard in that the consultation exercise specifically targeted young people as a sub group. Young people were directly consulted during the writing of the strategy.

The homelessness strategies of the six district authorities of Northumberland generally provide very little evidence of young people’s direct involvement in shaping and determining service delivery. Information regarding young people’s involvement in service delivery development was mainly secured from the interviews conducted with local authority officers. Views about the delivery and format of housing from young people were obtained by the youth agencies active in particular local authority areas – an approach which suffers from the same problems as those described above. Yet, in many small rural housing departments the indirect consultation of young people via a youth project appears to be the only realistic method of consultation. Wansbeck’s homelessness strategy, for example, does recognise that young people should have a say in how their housing requirements are shaped and delivered. In Tynedale the Local Authority has a long-standing relationship with the Links Project and both parties involved identify consultation as effective and informative. Young people have built up a relationship with the Links project and therefore are able and willing to discuss issues. Information is then fed through to the local authority and is generally taken on board. The Links project is confident that in this way the young person’s views are being considered despite the lack of any direct mechanisms for consultation.

**Best use of existing studies and consultations with young people**

Specific research studies and consultations are sometimes referred to within the documentation of the local authorities of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. In one or two instances, local authority reviews and strategies acknowledge their own involvement in the commissioning, delivery and/or implementation of research, while one or two more refer to the findings of existing studies as contributing to a general knowledge base about the experiences of homelessness young people in their area. For example, Sunderland consulted a single homeless survey conducted by Centrepoint. However, from the interview process it became apparent that few local authority areas across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear consulted existing research studies regarding young people and youth homelessness before developing their strategies.

\textsuperscript{13} 8:59 Centrepoint: What’s Next for Young People, (2003 November) ‘Tackling youth homelessness in Gateshead: Beyond a youth homelessness strategy.’ Centrepoint works in partnership with Gateshead Action on Homelessness. Gateshead Council and One North East have funded this project.
There is very little reference to existing studies within the strategies of local authorities in Tyne and Wear, while the number of studies into rural youth homelessness and in particular Northumberland is limited. It follows therefore that use of existing studies and consultations with young people by the rural local authorities in Northumberland is limited. Reference to research conducted by a youth project was made in Blyth Valley’s homelessness strategy. Alnwick’s strategy referred to research conducted into the levels of youth homelessness in the area by the Community Council of Northumberland in 2000.

During the interviews with local authority representatives, many acknowledged the need to conduct research into youth homelessness and to gain a better insight into the issues, causes and solutions to the problem. However staffing and financial resources have so far limited their ability to explore the issues in the detail they would like.

**Good Practice**

**Gateshead**
- Gateshead is identified as delivering good practice for their three-year research project entitled ‘Tackling youth homelessness in Gateshead: Beyond a youth homelessness strategy.’ *(This research was commissioned post strategy development).* The research includes consultation with young people and aims to improve the housing and support options available for homeless young people. Furthermore the findings will be fed back into the review process of the current strategy.

**Newcastle**
- Newcastle is identified as delivering good practice for specifically identifying, involving and consulting young people. Newcastle achieved their consultation with young people through Newcastle Independence Network, and INLINE Youth Voice.
- Newcastle is identified as delivering good practice for their development of a young peoples forum. The development of the forum was as a result of consultation with young people. Young people recognised that they must enter a process of continual dialogue with decision makers in order to make services work effectively in the future for them.
- Newcastle is identified as delivering good practice as a result of their development of joint assessment work between homelessness officers and social workers. This work was developed in order for social services and homelessness workers to provide joint assessments for housing and support under the Children Act 1989 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 1990. This development arose from the consultation undertaken with young people.

**Tynedale**
- Tynedale's consultation with young people in a rural area is identified as a model of good practice. Direct consultation with young people by small rural local authorities is often difficult to achieve due to resource and staff shortages. However in Tynedale the views and needs of young people were accessed via an independent agency that resulted in consultation data being utilised by the local authority.
- The Links housing project and Tynedale District Council liaise closely regarding the housing and support needs of young people. Links provide Tynedale with detailed information regarding the views and housing needs of young people. Any changes in trends and or characteristics of homelessness are reported via Links. Last year Links helped 171 young people including 47 aged under 18 years old.
- Tynedale are also developing a young person’s strategy that will cover issues such as health, recreation and leisure.
3.2 Prevention

Action Points

In order to ensure that homelessness strategies are orientated and focused towards prevention it is essential that Local Authorities:

- Research the individual causes and characteristics of youth homelessness in their local area on an iterative basis.
- Ensure that any findings/information are shared not only between individual Local Authority departments but also between neighbouring local authorities.
- Ensure that the homelessness issues highlighted are incorporated into other Local Authority strategies as appropriate.
- Develop training with local schools and youth projects on issues relating to homelessness and publicise these in the community.
- Develop family mediation services specifically targeting young person/parent relationship break down.
- Provide debt/welfare benefit advice to those young people threatened with homelessness in addition to those who are actually homeless and those who have been rehoused.
- Develop specialist support for young people especially for those with mental health/drug/alcohol problems and for those who have experienced physical and or sexual abuse.

North Tyneside identify reasons for young people becoming homeless, and these reasons underpin the development and delivery of their preventive work. North Tyneside describes an impressive array of preventive work within their local authority area. North Tyneside has a range of services working towards preventing homelessness including advice on debt, budget management and family mediation, as well as youth services, and work by Connexions. Preventative services also undertake work with young people at risk of becoming homeless, providing outreach support and guidance, delivering intensive support during early months of independent living, as well as delivering educational work and floating support. Other preventative work detailed in the North Tyneside strategy documentation includes monitoring information that identifies vulnerability and/or the likelihood of the potential for becoming homeless.

Awareness raising – understanding underlying issues leading to homelessness

The majority of reviews and strategies provide some discussion of the factors underpinning and/or the underlying issues leading to homelessness. More often than not the factors are presented as relating to all homeless people and are described as generic factors rather than specific risk factors. Moreover, in some areas, the discussion varies between problems facing homeless people, and explanations as to why people become homeless. In one or two documents, there is discussion of repeat homelessness. In one or two documents, there is evidence within action plans that additional work to be carried out will attempt to uncover and understand underlying issues leading
to homelessness and youth homelessness over future months. Furthermore a number of local authority representatives identified some understanding and awareness of a number of the underlying issues leading to homelessness in general and a number expressed interest in further developing this knowledge.

Newcastle has a wide variety of projects established to highlight homelessness issues amongst young people. Newcastle City Council are working with Youth Voice and are making a film regarding the dangers of homelessness that will then be put on the web site. They are also carrying out peer education work in schools. The Blyth Valley strategy identifies a number of reasons why young people become homeless and it identifies a lack of mediation services as one potential problem. The Tynedale strategy identifies young people as a specific group at risk of becoming homeless and highlight that they are commissioning research to look in more detail at the possible causes and solutions. The Morpeth strategy again identifies specific reasons for youth homelessness and recognises the need for specialist support and awareness raising, while the Wansbeck strategy aims to raise the profile of youth homelessness and increase the understanding of the problems faced. They intend to evaluate a project where young people are trained to act as peer educators to offer advice to other young people regarding sexual health. They hope that this approach can be used in homelessness prevention for young people. Each of the rural local authority representatives acknowledged in interviews that further work should be undertaken to uncover and understand underlying issues leading to homelessness and youth homelessness.

**Identifying and working with young people at risk of becoming homeless**

**The role of schools and youth services, Connexions and other agencies in identifying and preventing homelessness**

The prevention of homelessness is detailed as one of the aims of each of the various local authority strategies within Tyne and Wear, although this does not always include specifically youth homelessness. Many local authorities in Tyne and Wear detail objectives that include the means by which the prevention of homelessness will be achieved, including working with young people at risk of becoming homeless. Moreover, the majority of local authorities offer evidence of working with young people at risk of becoming homeless. In some cases identifying and working with young people at risk of becoming homeless is acknowledged as aspirational rather than operational.

In addition, the majority of local authorities in Tyne and Wear detail the ways in which young people at risk of becoming homeless are targeted through the provision of projects, initiatives and programmes by particular agencies and organisations and through partnership working. A number of local authorities in Tyne and Wear acknowledge that although projects, initiatives and
programmes are often in place, they require further and additional development particularly in relation to joint and partnership working.

There is variation within the local authorities in Tyne and Wear regarding the role of schools and youth services. Four local authority areas are currently or have previously been working with schools. A further local authority has plans to undertake preventive work within schools in the future. In addition there is evidence of a modest amount of preventive work being undertaken with youth services within Tyne and Wear. Many have a number of services working towards the prevention of homelessness in general but not necessarily youth homelessness. However all five local authority areas within Tyne and Wear are currently working with or have plans to work with Connexions.

Gateshead has carried out a briefing session with twenty-five teachers from a range of schools who then disseminated the information across the school estate. Centrepoint are working in Gateshead and have a Homelessness Forum. Whilst not solely targeted at young people a large part of their work does focus on young people. Sunderland work with Connexions in schools and arrange for young people from Sunderland and Newcastle to come together to discuss their experiences of being homeless.

Across Northumberland there is a wide variation in the level of preventative work undertaken. A number of district authorities carry out limited preventative work but some carry out none at all. Others such as Blyth Valley have a variety of preventative projects and measures in place, including working in schools both directly and through a third party. Morpeth’s strategy recognises the role that Connexions can play in preventing future youth homelessness. A number of strategies again detail the preventative work carried out on their behalf via voluntary sector agencies and partnerships. In Tynedale for example the Links project delivers both housing advice and specific work with young people on behalf of the Local Authority, including tenancy support to prevent repeat homelessness. In addition Tynedale have a Youth Forum that also deals with homelessness and prevention.

Prevention of homelessness and specifically youth homelessness was identified as an area for future development by each of the rural local authority representatives when interviewed. Berwick upon Tweed’s homelessness strategy includes details of their plans to raise young people’s awareness of homelessness issues and to produce educational material and visit schools to discuss housing and homelessness. These plans were discussed further during the interview but staffing levels and resources are again a limiting factor here.

There is variation within the rural local authorities strategic documents regarding the role of schools and youth services, Connexions and other agencies in identifying and preventing homelessness. In some local authority strategies, the role and mechanisms through which schools and other agencies are involved in identifying and preventing homelessness is well developed. In other areas however the involvement of these agencies is yet to be developed. The interviews provided more in depth information regarding
current and proposed activity. In Blyth Valley for example the local authority recently held a homelessness and money management day at a local school where young people were informed about the cost of living and benefit levels.

Education and awareness raising for young people

Across Tyne and Wear, there is some planned and current education and awareness raising, although as detailed above, there remains variations and differences in detail and emphasis across each of the five local authorities. Illustration centres for the most part on a number of key areas including the production of advice booklets, staff training, posters, and awareness raising with housing providers. Sunderland is currently planning an impressive publicity campaign that includes posters and leaflets aimed at prevention and advice for homeless people including young people. The posters and leaflets include a free phone number with an ‘out of services’ hours phone line (this service is run in conjunction with Newcastle).

Within Tyne and Wear partnership working also aims to raise awareness about local services alongside 'risk' factors, ‘best practice’ and information exchange. North Tyneside, for example, has established a multi agency steering group in which one of the key stakeholders is Education. The steering group splits into 4 sub groups one of which is a young persons group. In Gateshead, Centrepoint are currently active in education and awareness raising through their work generally but also through the Homelessness Forum. For the most part, partnership discussion on education and awareness raising is, however, general rather than young people specific. Further work also includes the provision of information to potentially homeless and homeless people making them aware of the services available.

Across Northumberland, there is evidence of education and awareness raising for young people, although again there are variations and differences of detail and emphasis within and across the local authorities’ strategic documentation. Discussion usually centres on the production of advice booklets. A number of these booklets - whilst dealing in general terms with homelessness - are relevant to young people. Blyth valley has produced a range of advice leaflets dealing with different aspects of homelessness which whilst not directly targeted at young people have relevance to them. Wansbeck have produced a ‘what now’ booklet which is aimed at young people.

Dealing with family breakdown, family mediation and support

Within the region of Tyne and Wear there are a number of support services that offer a varied service for young people. There is only one area that has a mediation service specifically for young people to deal with family breakdown, support and help resolve conflicts (North Tyneside service entitled MINT). The other areas within Tyne and Wear either plan assessment of whether their current support services meet the needs of young people, or currently have a more generally orientated mediation service. Furthermore a number of areas refer young people to a range of services which include community housing
service, advice and support workers, health visitors, and social workers for dealing with family breakdown, family mediation and support. It is acknowledged by a number of local authorities in Tyne and Wear either that a lack of mediation and reconciliation services for young people could be significant factors for young people becoming homeless. Generally the majority of local authorities in Tyne and Wear have support services that are not age specific and relate to homelessness generally rather than youth homelessness specifically.

North Tyneside is in the process of establishing a mediation service aimed specifically at young people. Gateshead run a general mediation service and is hoping to develop a specific family service that could deal with family breakdowns and thereby prevent youth homelessness. They do currently try to mediate between young people and their families but are keen to develop a more targeted approach. South Tyneside acknowledge that the lack of any mediation service could be a significant factor in the cause of youth homelessness. They therefore plan to fund a mediation worker to work with the South Tyneside Action for Youth Network. The funding for this post is from the homelessness grant.

The majority of the homelessness strategies produced in Northumberland refer to mechanisms for dealing with family breakdown, family mediation and support. Often strategic documentation provides evidence of current and/or future developments and action planning. In the majority of strategic documents, however, the discussion is not age specific and relates to homelessness generally rather than youth homelessness specifically.

The Morpeth strategy recognises that family breakdown is a major factor in youth homelessness and advises preventative action to be undertaken by both housing and social services. It also acknowledges the role of Connexions in directing young people to appropriate agencies for help.

The Tynedale strategy recognises family breakdown as a cause of youth homelessness and acknowledges that whilst they cannot prevent relationship breakdown they can assist in managing the situation and minimise the risk of homelessness. Furthermore Tynedale’s strategy mentions assisting young people who have left home to be reconciled with their families. Wansbeck has a range of preventative services already in place including tenancy support and family mediation for young homeless people. One of Wansbeck’s key strategic actions is to explore the opportunities for providing specialist family mediation. Berwick upon Tweed’s strategy mentions plans to look at support mechanisms for young people whose families have split up and further details of these plans were provided during the interview with the relevant local authority representative. Berwick upon Tweed are keen to train housing officers in mediation. Many of the local authority representatives in Northumberland when interviewed explained that they plan to develop or expand their mediation services.

**Specialist support and advice for young people who have experienced physical, sexual or mental abuse or for young people with drug, alcohol or mental health problems**
Within the region of Tyne and Wear there are a number of specialist services which offer support for people who have drug and alcohol problems, people with mental health difficulties, and people with physical or sensory disabilities. However there is limited support for young people who have experienced physical or/and sexual abuse. Furthermore some areas acknowledge that the provision is unable to meet current needs. They have accordingly developed a range of action plans which include joint training and awareness raising between mental health and housing providers. A further two areas have engaged a consultant to audit the current services to identify gaps and duplication in provision. Not all areas within Tyne and Wear have their own services for each of the above mentioned specialist support needs and rely on referring people to relevant agencies. In the majority of instances, what services are available are not exclusively specific to the needs and experiences of young people.

Sunderland has support services available for drug users. However, while these are not specifically targeted at young people, young people are a client group that benefit form the service. In Gateshead the local authority support officers work alongside other specialist workers such as the drug abuse team. In addition they also employ three refugee support workers who often work with young refugees. A scheme for young people with mental health problems is being developed with Byker Bridge Housing Association. Newcastle have identified that almost twenty five percent of evictions are against people with drug problems. They are therefore working with drug agencies, Supporting People and hospitals. South Tyneside, whilst not operating any alcohol or drug services, refer any young person to the appropriate voluntary or statutory agencies.

Whilst many of the homelessness strategies produced across Northumberland do refer to specialist support and advice for people with complex issues such as alcohol and drug abuse, in the majority, discussion is not specific to the needs and experiences of young people. However Berwick upon Tweed’s Housing Department - which has previously prioritised dealing with domestic violence - are keen to prioritise and develop mediation and support services for young people with drug and alcohol problems. Wansbeck have a number of agencies providing specialist support for people with drug and alcohol problems but acknowledge the lack of specialist accommodation for this group. It is an area that they intend to look at but do not make specific reference to young people within this aim. Tynedale acknowledge that young people who are misusing drugs and alcohol are at great risk of becoming homeless and are awaiting reports into drugs and alcohol and homelessness. They also have a substance misuse worker active within Tynedale and although not specifically for young people a majority of the clients are young people.

Morpeth recognise that a number of homeless people have experienced deterioration in physical or mental health and an increase in substance abuse. There is currently a project operational within Morpeth providing housing and support for people with mental health issues although not specifically for young people. Morpeth recognise that further work is required into the
provision of specialist support and accommodation for young people with drug, alcohol and or mental health problems. Wansbeck are developing a housing support service with the Sunderland Housing Group of four flats for young people who are undergoing treatment for drugs and or alcohol abuse problems and need on going support. A teenage pregnancy advice and support service operates throughout rural Northumberland.

**Low income and debt management**

Within the area of Tyne and Wear four local authorities have services that offer low income and debt support. These include a debt advice worker, budgeting advice, benefits advice, and rent deposit schemes. However these services are not young people specific. Many of the homelessness strategies produced in Northumberland refer to low income and debt management. In the majority of instances, discussion is not specific to the needs and experiences of young people, although some individual documents are young people specific. The majority of the homelessness strategies in Northumberland refer to the work of DAWN (Debt Advice Within Northumberland) and most are working with the agency in their districts. Again this agency is not youth specific but does provide help and advice to young people. Tynedale acknowledge that debt and low income can be a cause of homelessness and recognises the role of Links, which gives debt advice to young people in the area. Berwick upon Tweed whilst not referring to young people specifically regarding debt and homelessness does raise the issue of ensuring that homeless people receive effective financial advice. Alnwick’s objectives within its strategy include the development of a service level agreement with a debt advice agency to ensure the early referral of clients. Whilst this is not linked directly to young people it would be possible and advisable to do so. Wansbeck mention proposals to investigate the possibility of a rent deposit scheme, which would benefit young people attempting to access accommodation in the private rented sector.

**Good Practice**

**Gateshead**
- Gateshead is identified as delivering good practice for their preventive work with young people through schools. Briefing sessions are undertaken with teachers, which are aimed at supplying them with enough information to enable feedback to the young people. Seeking advice and the pit falls of becoming homeless are emphasised.

**Newcastle**
- Newcastle is identified as delivering good practice in resettlement. Newcastle offer a range of services that include, benefits advice, resettlement, transport, help with grant and charities applications, follow up support, referral to specialist agencies and advice on the rights and the responsibilities of a tenant.

**North Tyneside**
- North Tyneside is identified as delivering good practice for their preventive work. Stage one involves the identification of the main reasons behind homelessness. Stage two involves the development of their preventive and support services which reflect the causes. These services include youth schemes and family mediation and work towards not only preventing but also supporting young people before and after becoming homeless within North Tyneside.
Sunderland
- Sunderland is identified as delivering good practice in awareness raising. This is due to their impressive posters and leaflets that include young people amongst other potential homeless groups. These posters/leaflets include a free phone line that offers advice 24hrs a day (*This is undertaken in conjunction with Newcastle*). The campaign not only raises awareness of homelessness but also offers support and advice.

Blyth Valley
- Blyth Valley housing company and the local authority’s development of a relationship with local schools is identified as an example of good practice. They conduct awareness raising sessions and have carried out money management days.
- The Point (Blyth) is identified as a good practice project and provides free, confidential advice to young people on issues such as health, benefits, drugs and alcohol, housing and homelessness.

Wansbeck
- Wansbeck council is identified as developing good practice through the publication of a ‘what now booklet’. The booklet has been widely distributed and details young peoples options when leaving home/school.
- Wansbeck council are working with Necar and with Sunderland housing group to provide supported accommodation to drug users who are in treatment. The provision of accommodation is dependent on the treatment continuing and support provided is 24 hour.

General
- Homeless Action Project is identified as a good practice project and are working in South East Northumberland providing support to young people between the ages of 16 and 25. The focus of their work is on prevention and education. They also conduct a mediation service between young people and their families.

### 3.3 Developing a tailored approach to rural youth homelessness

**Action points**

In order to ensure that homelessness strategies develop a tailored approach to rural youth homelessness, rural Local Authorities should:
- Formalise the collection and recording of data using a consistent pro forma both within and between rural Local Authorities, and other relevant departments and organisations and agencies.
- Continue to petition for increased allocations to provide appropriate accommodation and support across the rural area as the need is identified.
- Provide direct access accommodation.
- Develop multi tenure support packages for young people.
- Develop support for young people with mental health/drug/alcohol problems and those who have suffered from physical and sexual abuse.
- Develop inter district provision and support to enable more cost effective and specialist provision.

Rural youth homelessness is considered in relation to strategic documentation produced by the six district authorities in Northumberland. However, it must be noted that differences in levels and characteristics of youth homelessness
as well as service provision can be found within Northumberland as much as they can be found across the sub region as a whole. South East Northumberland is different to North East and South West Northumberland in terms of demography, geography, and the provision and location of services.

Collection of data from all relevant sources in a consistent and regular format.

The collection and collation of relevant data and its analysis and presentation in the six local authority strategies varies considerably between strategy documents. It is difficult to ascertain from some of the reviews/strategies the extent to which the data concerns homeless people generally and homeless young people specifically. A number of local authority representatives when interviewed acknowledged the limitations of their data and raised issues regarding its reliability. Several local authority representatives spoke of their intentions to attempt to improve the situation by introducing different mechanisms and processes. For example, Alnwick are keen to promote a joint protocol for data collection between all the organisations and agencies operating within its boundaries.

Publicity informing young people of their opportunities under the new Homelessness legislation.

The majority of homelessness strategies do not detail mechanisms for informing young people about their opportunities under the new Homelessness legislation, although a number do acknowledge that the legislative and service contexts have changed. A number of local authorities do indicate their future intentions in this regard in relation to homeless people generally, but there is little direct reference to young people specifically. The majority of the strategies offer little in the way of plans and milestones for informing homeless people and/or young people. The majority of the publicity work has been carried out via the youth projects operational within the local authority areas and this once again produces a variation in publicity available dependent on the local activity and presence of youth groups.

Supplying small localised responses networked throughout the county.

All six districts within Northumberland to varying degrees have developed localised responses to homelessness and these are loosely networked throughout the county. The provision within the most rural part of the County is located within the market towns of Berwick upon Tweed, Alnwick, Morpeth and Hexham. There are some excellent examples of supported accommodation projects across the most remote rural areas, which provide much needed housing and support for young people. However it is becoming increasingly obvious that the number of units provided by these projects is insufficient to meet current demand. This was acknowledged by all the local authorities in the interviews. Some local authorities would like to conduct an
audit to establish the detail and specialisms of current provision to enable them to plan any expansion in a targeted and effective manner.

**Provision of flexible support including pre and post tenancy input.**

Fundamental to the provision of accommodation is support. All the young persons housing projects within the rural area include high-level tenancy support, and the majority of projects also provide pre and post tenancy support. Comments regarding the financial viability of providing support to small numbers of young people made by many of the youth projects are acknowledged by many of the local authorities. It is most encouraging, however that despite the financial difficulties and pressures that the rural accommodation projects operate under, the service provision is excellent. A number of the local authority strategies detail proposals to work with youth services and Connexions within the area in order to increase knowledge of issues and services available and advise young people about issues surrounding independent living and accommodation.

**Education and awareness raising for young people.**

A number of the strategies do refer to the current provision and/or the future development of education and awareness raising for young people. In one instance this involves the implementation of a scheme to train young people as peer educators. However a number of strategies do not offer any discussion of education and awareness raising specifically in relation to young people. The use of Connexions within this context is mentioned by a number of authorities as is visiting and working within schools.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Good Practice</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Alnwick</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- The Gallery Project is identified as delivering good practice project managing and providing support for young people in 5 flats in Alnwick town centre. They also provide pre and post tenancy support.</td>
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<td><strong>Berwick upon Tweed.</strong></td>
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<td>- Berwick youth project is identified as delivering good practice project. They have 11 units of accommodation available in two locations within the town centre. The accommodation is all supported and life skills training is provided</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Blyth</strong></td>
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<td>- Hayloft is identified as delivering good practice project. This is a leaving care scheme for young people between the ages of 16-21. They currently have 6 bed spaces and 1 satellite flat within Blyth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Byker Bridge Housing Association is identified as delivering good practice project and currently provide supported accommodation for people with mental health, substance misuse or learning difficulties- 8 bed spaces. Floating support is also provided to 12 clients.</td>
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<td><strong>Morpeth.</strong></td>
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The Barnabas project is identified as delivering good practice project. They provide support to 11 young people in both council and private tenancies in Morpeth. Three of the tenancies have been secured by the project itself.

The Homeless Accommodation project (Hap) is identified as delivering good practice project. They provide support for between 19 and 21 young people in the Morpeth area in a variety of tenures.

Tynedale.
- Links housing project is identified as delivering good practice project. They have developed a young person’s centre in Hexham that provides supported accommodation for 9 young people and in addition have a direct emergency access flat. The centre also offers a range of services including facilitating education, training and employment opportunities and learning life skills.

Wansbeck
- Northumberland castles is identified as delivering good practice project and currently provides accommodation and support to 8 young people within Wansbeck.
- Barnardos supported lodgings project in Wansbeck is identified as an example of best practice. It offers young people accommodation and support within the community.

3.4 Developing support for young people who have been homeless

Action Points

In order to ensure that homelessness strategies reflect the needs of young people who have been homeless Local Authorities should:
- Develop appropriate provision using the information obtained from research into causes of homelessness.
- Develop resettlement packages with other agencies and or departments.
- Carry out independent living skills training via schools, youth projects and other appropriate agencies and organisations.

North Tyneside has an impressive range of services for young people. Such provision identifies a very real understanding of the key issues regarding young people and homelessness. These services include those developed by Churches Acting Together, including The Gateway Project, The Start Up Scheme, The Fresh Start Project, The Compass Project, and The Supported Lodgings Scheme, alongside The Inline Service, Young Parents Support Service, The Base, Base Connexions, and Mediation amongst others. The support provided can be intensive, and includes training, housing advice, support to help young people maintain tenancy, and employment advice to help young people resettle.

Choice, diversity and variety of services provided

Across local authorities in Tyne and Wear, there are degrees of choice, diversity and variety of services provided for young people who have been homeless. Indeed, there are variations within and across local authority areas regarding the diversity and variety of services offered. Furthermore not all
services are specifically offered to young homeless people. Any analysis of choice, diversity and variety is dependent upon the:

- Variation in the nature and type of services available to individuals generally who have previously been homeless within specific local authority areas, and the
- Extent to which homeless young people are provided for separately in any area (or in so much as the strategic documentation provides clarification of the extent to which young people are provided for).

Sunderland operate a landlord accreditation scheme that enables young people to access private rented accommodation which would not be otherwise available to them. Across Northumberland there is little degree of choice, diversity and variety of services provided for young people who have been homeless. The voluntary sector plays a very important role in both the provision of advice and accommodation to young people. Advice can be accessed from broader non-youth specific agencies but in general young people in Northumberland seeking advice and support would contact their local youth project or similar youth agency.

**Resettlement support, independent living skills and tenancy sustainment**

There is discussion of resettlement support, tenancy sustainment and independent living skills within the majority of the reviews and strategies produced across Tyne and Wear. Given the diversity of experience of homelessness and youth homelessness and the nature and composition of the various local authorities that make up Tyne and Wear, the nature, type and number of support services differs by area. In some local authority areas, strategic documentation details both current and proposed activities, while in others, strategic documentation indicates that there is a clear intention for approaches and practices to be developed. It has proved difficult to identify and differentiate ‘support’ for homeless people in general and ‘support’ for homeless young people.

Services for resettlement support, independent living skills and tenancy sustainment within Tyne and Wear are not, for the most part, age specific. Where available these services are for young people to access amongst others groups. Gateshead has a support team in operation and support is given specifically to young people. Very few young people are now moving into accommodation without support and this support is also offered when the person chooses to move on.

There is discussion of resettlement support, tenancy sustainment and independent living skills within the majority of the reviews and strategies produced across Northumberland with most detailing current and proposed activities. Several of the strategies point to joint working with the voluntary sector to provide support and independent living skills. It is difficult, however, to determine from the strategies which proposals are specifically young person centred. The interviews provided an opportunity for this to be clarified and for details regarding young peoples support to be collected. Morpeth
identifies two projects operating within its area that provide support specifically to young people. The Links project in Hexham takes a holistic approach to young people’s needs and focuses upon health issues, life skills, education and training as well as housing support. Blyth valley housing department and Social Services are working with young people who have been in care and are not ready to move out and live independently. They are developing a scheme whereby properties will be leased to the young people and support and independent living skills training provided by Social Services. Berwick Youth Project now provides supported accommodation in two locations within Berwick, on the quay steps and in the Beehive centre. The housing support worker carries out specific independent living skills sessions with existing tenants in both locations.

A client centred approach, focussing on the needs of young people

Across Tyne and Wear it can be suggested that there is overwhelmingly a client centred approach underpinning the various reviews and strategies developed and devised, although the extent to which client centred approaches are specific to young people is varied. However in addition to the broader focused policies and services, there are numerous examples of young person specific policies and services. In Northumberland there generally is a client-centered approach but it is often difficult to identify young people as a specific group within the overall client group. However the interviews provided encouraging evidence of a growing awareness and acknowledgment of the specific needs of this group and a determination to assist in the identification and satisfaction of those needs. Both the homelessness strategies and the interviews provided many examples of joint working between local authorities in the region and the voluntary sector to provide advice and accommodation to utilise the scarce finance and resources and maximise provision.

Good Practice

**North Tyneside**
- North Tyneside is identified as delivering good practice for their range of support services for young people. North Tyneside services reflect the key support and training issues for homeless young people. They include support, advice and training, for young people at risk, and provides an individual needs assessment of the need of the young person.

**Sunderland**
- Sunderland is identified as delivering good practice for their landlord and accreditation scheme for young people. This is due to Sunderland providing young people an opportunity to access privately rented accommodation which other wise would not be available to young people.

**Gateshead**
- Gateshead is identified as delivering good practice for their letting support workers scheme. The lettings support workers offer general tenancy support. In addition they work alongside drug workers when needed. This scheme leaves very few young people going into a tenancy without support.
3.5 An inter-agency approach

### Action Points

In order to ensure that the homelessness strategies are relevant and related across relevant departmental, organisational and agency strategies Local Authorities should:

- Develop an inter agency steering group including representatives from as many relevant departments and organisations as relevant.
- Agree joint protocols between both Local Authority departments and between the Local authority and voluntary agencies operating in the area.
- Develop sub groups to progress individual topics/issues.
- Develop sub regional and regional steering groups to share best practice and to raise awareness of issues and trends.

Gateshead has developed a Homelessness Forum entitled ‘Gateshead Action on Homelessness’. Membership includes representatives from Aquila Housing Association, a Student Adviser from Gateshead College, North British Housing, Nomad Housing Group, Shelter North East, Resettlement Officer, Gateshead Private Landlord Association, Gateshead Alcohol and Drug Team, Gateshead Council Community Based, Stepping Stones, North East Night Stop, Gateshead Probation Service, Local Initiative Team, Policy Team Gateshead Council, Gateshead Young Women’s Outreach, NECA, Regeneration Team Gateshead Council, NORCARE, Connexions Tyne and Wear, Youth Information Officer, Disability Gateshead, Gateshead Women’s Refuge, Supporting People Community Based Services, The Avenues Project, Streetwise, Centrepoint, Turning Point Arrest Referral, Haven, Development Worker from Young Peoples Services, Gateshead Health Centre, Health Promotion Specialist, Gateshead Alcohol and Drug Team. This forum was originally set up with a strong emphasis on young people. However Gateshead recognised that homelessness was increasing, and as a result it broadened its focus. It is through this forum that Centrepoint was commissioned to undertake a three-year study entitled, ‘Tackling youth homelessness in Gateshead: Beyond a youth homelessness strategy’.

**Inter-agency approach, working with Social Services, Housing Departments, Youth Offending Teams, Police, Health Authorities, Connexions, Voluntary Organisations, and Others.**

Inter-agency, multi-agency and partnership working has developed across most of the local authority areas within Tyne and Wear. Across Tyne and Wear there is an impressive array of organisations working together to tackle homelessness in general, and youth homelessness specifically. Certainly there is clear evidence of statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations coming together and working either in partnership or jointly in a multi-agency approach. Agencies and organisations involved in joint approaches in specific areas include Social Services Departments, Housing Departments, YOTs, Police, Health Authorities, Connexions, Voluntary Organisations and others.
For example Sunderland has formed a homeless working group that includes representatives from each of the above agencies.

Before the majority of strategies were developed within Tyne and Wear, consultation was undertaken with agencies and services in order to help strategic development. In a number of areas, documents link in to one another. For example, homelessness strategies link in to relevant other partnership strategies including the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and the Youth Offending Team (YOT). Furthermore a regional Homelessness Forum has been set up. A number of local authorities in Tyne and Wear have highlighted the need to further develop an interagency approach to homelessness. In specific areas within Tyne and Wear, inter-agency, multi-agency and partnership working is developing, and is developing well, with action plans attached to such developments.

Inter-agency, multi-agency and partnership working has developed across most of the local authority areas within Northumberland. Again, there is evidence of statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations coming together and working either in partnership or jointly in a multi-agency approach. Agencies and organisations involved in joint approaches in specific areas include Social Services Departments, Housing Departments, YOTs, Police, health Authorities, Connexions, voluntary organisations and others. In a number of areas, different strategic documents link in to one another and into the homelessness strategies. For example, in a number of local authority areas, homelessness strategies link in to other partnership strategies including the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and the Youth Offending Team (YOT). A number of strategic documents highlight the need to further develop an interagency approach to homelessness. Tynedale have produced a draft young persons strategy that focuses on young people and their health, recreation and leisure requirements. The Homelessness strategy acknowledges the need to link into this young persons strategy and to consult on whether a separate young persons housing strategy should be developed.

Agreed protocols across agencies

There are a number of protocols operational or being developed within Tyne and Wear. Such protocols can be divided into two types. The first type are those protocols which operate across local authority areas and involve the coming together of local authorities in respect of youth homelessness. The second protocol is one that brings together specific local organisations and agencies operating within one local authority boundary.

In a number of local authority areas across Tyne and Wear, there are a number of inter-agency protocols developed and implemented, the aim of which are to give clarity to and ensure the joint delivery of services across specific areas and in respect of specific activities. In a number of other areas, local authorities have expressed local ambition and aspiration to develop protocols, and many of these are described in actions plans. However in
some cases protocols are referring to homelessness service provision generally and not youth homelessness service provision specifically. In a number of local authority areas across Northumberland, there are a number of inter-agency protocols developed and implemented, the aim of which are to give clarity to and ensure the joint delivery of services across specific areas and in respect of specific activities/services.

In the Autumn of 2001 a protocol was agreed by the six Northumberland District Councils and Northumberland County Council to address the needs of homeless young people aged 16/17 and young people aged 16 to 21 who have housing, social, care and support needs and who are leaving the care of the local authority. The Housing Protocol was reviewed and improved as part of the homelessness review process completed in April 2003. During the interviews conducted with the Local Authorities a number reported that the protocol was not working as effectively as was originally envisaged but that steps were being taken to improve the process and protocol. The majority of the local authorities are members of the sub regional partnership that focuses upon homelessness and youth homelessness amongst other issues. Alnwick district intends to develop a protocol with the Gallery Youth Project that provides supported accommodation in Alnwick town. They currently have a Homelessness Forum. Whilst this forum deals with all aspects of homelessness it is expected that youth homelessness will feature strongly in its work. Tynedale have a compact in place with the Links housing project that details the methodology of joint working, and also is a member of the sub regional drug and alcohol group that also looks at homelessness.

Good Practice

Gateshead
- Gateshead is identified as delivering good practice in relation to their Homelessness Forum, ‘Gateshead Action on Homelessness.’ The forum includes a number of representatives from a range of relevant agencies working together to tackle homelessness and youth homelessness. Through this forum a three-year research project has been commissioned that will contribute to tackling youth homelessness in Gateshead.

Newcastle
- Newcastle is identified as delivering good practice due to their instrumental work in setting up the Tyne and Wear Homeless Officer Group in 2000. In addition good practice can be found in their development of a protocol for the speedy transfer of homeless people who apply to an authority where they do not have a local connection. Further work includes developing common responses to clients with complex needs, benchmarking and work with the Core Cities group of local authorities on homelessness.

North Tyneside
- North Tyneside is identified as delivering good practice in the establishment of a homelessness multi agency steering group. This brings together a number of agencies and organisations from both local authority and the voluntary sector to work together to develop action plans and develop good practice. It is also worth noting that the steering group is split into 4 sub groups one of which focuses upon young people. These sub groups consist of relevant agencies and organisations and their work feeds back into the main steering group.
- North Tyneside is identified as delivering good practice for their establishment of a joint protocol with homelessness service providers and social services to carry out single assessments to address both sections of legislation (Children Act 1989 and Homelessness Act 2002). This joint working will assess whether 16/17 year olds were
ready for independent living or reconciliation. Thus working towards preventing and supporting young people and their needs.

Northumberland

- A joint protocol was developed between the 6 Northumberland local authority housing departments and the County Social Services to address the needs of young people between 16-21 who have housing, social, care and support needs and who are leaving the care of the local authority.
4. Key Questions and Critical Issues

This review has highlighted a number of areas for improvement as well as some good practice examples. It also highlights that more can be done across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear to ensure that the aims of the YHI are achieved by 2005. Specifically, in response to the YHI wish that the review identifies ‘the key questions and critical issues that we want to discuss with all the LAs about their approach to tackling youth homelessness in relation to us achieving our aim’, this section details a number of key questions and critical issues under the five thematic areas used throughout this report.

Consultation

- What role do young people play at the strategic and service delivery levels? To what extent are young people consulted at the strategic and service delivery levels? Are they partners or stakeholders? Or are they just consulted in an extractive manner? In what ways could young people play a more central role in developing strategy and service delivery?
- To what extent is consultation participatory and action orientated? To what extent do young homeless people receive feedback in relation to the areas (strategy/service) they are consulted about? To what extent is consultation an iterative process?
- What do local authorities need to help develop not only consultative mechanisms, but mechanisms that are participatory for young people with a clear link to service delivery and strategic development?
- Is there a skills/training need in relation to developing effective, iterative and participatory consultation mechanisms at strategic and service delivery levels?
- Is there a capacity issue especially in rural areas in relation to developing effective, iterative and participatory consultation mechanisms at strategic and service delivery levels?

Prevention

- To what extent have the static and dynamic factors responsible for youth homelessness been identified at local levels through reliable research that includes engagement with young people themselves?
- How does the authority ensure that both the strategy and the services available are publicised and that awareness raising is delivered? Is there a strategic approach to raising awareness and developing understanding across partners and organisations/agencies?
- To what extent are preventative services young people specific? To what extent are preventative services able to respond to the needs of young people at risk?
• To what extent are the prevention services evidence based and draw upon effective practice? To what extent do preventative services link and join together?
• To what extent is the issue of homeless young people mainstreamed across the authority?

Developing a tailored approach to rural youth homelessness

• What are the key issues relating to rural youth homelessness? These can include the factors associated with the underlying issues leading to rural youth homelessness, the risk factors associated with becoming homeless and the most effective ways of preventing rural youth homeless and providing resettlement and support for those who have been homeless? To what extent do the reviews and strategic documentation offer clarity regarding these issues?
• How can the collation, collection and analysis of information and data better be strategically delivered and managed? Is a Northumberland approach necessary? What are the blockages to this? Or should the approach be at the district level?
• How can rural strategic working be better developed and delivered across Northumberland which gives meaning to young people and takes account of their needs and rights?
• How can networks and partnerships be better developed to ensure added value, shared approaches and cost reductions in education and awareness raising, provision of flexible support and publicity?
• How can the issue of rural youth homelessness be raised in terms of accessing resources and finance at regional and national levels?

Support for young people who have been homeless

• To what extent is there a wide range of services available for young people who have been homeless and to what extent do these cater specifically for young people and take account of young peoples needs?
• To what extent is there agreement across the local authority and the various agencies and organisations working within the authority boundary as to what constitutes a client centred approach?
• To what extent are the needs of young people who have been homeless understood and addressed across the local authority and the various agencies and organisations working within the authority boundary?
• To what extent are rights afforded a central role in relation to developing and delivering services and support for young people who have been homeless?

An inter-agency approach

• In what forum/fora is youth homelessness formally discussed at a multi-agency/strategic level across the authority? Does it meet monthly? Quarterly? Is there a process of annual review and performance monitoring?
In what forum/fora is youth homelessness discussed at a multi-
agency/strategic level across the sub region (Northumberland and Tyne
and Wear)? Does meet monthly? Quarterly? Is there a process of annual
review and performance monitoring?

To what extent does the Northumberland Protocol guide and develop
cross-district/borough working at the strategic level? To what extent is this
iteratively reviewed and in what forum do agencies and organisations and
strategists and practitioners come together to ensure the importance of the
protocol?

What have been the issues in relation to developing protocols (across
agencies/organisations and across local authority boundaries)? Have
these been overcome? If not, what blockages remain and why?

How can authority areas work in partnership at both strategic and service
delivery levels? What mechanisms need to be in place to help bring about
a sub-regional strategic approach in each authority area?

With regards such developments, what is the potential for cross authority
working? To what extent does cross authority working occur? Has this
been explored and if so in what ways? What are the first steps to
developing cross authority working?

**Additional key questions and critical issues**

In addition to the five core areas identified by the Community Foundation YHI
and reviewed in this document, a number of further critical issues arise from a
review of the strategic documentation in relation to youth homelessness in the
sub region of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. These relate to:

- The process of review and strategy development,
- The skills base, competencies and training requirements
- Evaluation, monitoring and performance review
- Cross-authority working.

It can be argued that in each of these areas, more could and should be
detailed in relation to these areas in the various strategic documents.

- Is strategy development and revision iterative? What mechanisms are in
  place to ensure that review and strategy development is iterative rather
  than a one off process in the future? What are the blockages to this, if
  any? How can they be overcome, if necessary?
- What are the staff development/training issues in relation to youth
  homelessness at the authority level? Has a skills audit/training needs
  assessment been carried out in relation to developing strategic and service
delivery around homeless young people?
- What mechanisms are in place to monitor provision in the authority area?
  Does monitoring take account of action plans? Is it strategic monitoring or
  service specific? How is monitoring carried out and with what purpose?
  What is monitored (inputs, throughputs, outputs, quality, performance,
  financial etc)? What is the quality of data collection mechanisms and how
  are they to be refined and reviewed? To what extent does monitoring feed
in to the iterative review and strategy process? What mechanisms are in place to ensure that this happens? Are there knowledge/skills gap/capacity issues in relation to strategic monitoring in the local authority area?

- What evaluative mechanisms are in place in the authority area? Is evaluation participative and embedded in strategic and service delivery or is it ad hoc? To what extent do local authority areas know what works? How is ‘works’ defined? What works at the strategic level? What works in service delivery? What are the requirements of local authority areas in relation to developing and implementing an evaluation of strategic and service delivery?

- To what extent do developments detailed in strategies have milestones attached to their implementation and delivery? To what extent are they realistic? To what extent are they aspirational or actual? And what is the process of review in relation to their development? To what extent are these short and medium term developments? Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that these developments fit both strategic and partnership approaches to working with homeless young people?

- How is performance measured in relation to reducing youth homelessness in local authority areas? How is performance against action plans measured? How realistic are action plans?


Francis, P. Alvey, S. Clark, A. Dolman, F. (2002) Youth Homelessness Strategy in Northumberland and Tyne And Wear: A Review Of The Documentary Evidence Northumbria University, Community Safety Research Unit


