

**Cambridge** Centre  
for Housing &  
Planning Research

# **The role of housing and housing providers in tackling poverty experienced by young people in the UK:**

## **New evidence from housing providers**

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# **The role of housing and housing providers in tackling poverty experienced by young people in the UK: New evidence from housing providers**

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## Introduction

This ESRC-funded study was part of the ‘What Works in Tackling Poverty’ theme, and focused on the role of housing providers in addressing poverty faced by 16-25 year olds<sup>1</sup>. This paper presents the findings from the exploratory strand of the work which explored emerging or innovative practice in tackling poverty experienced by young people. Ten case study projects, run by housing providers, were studied over an 18 month period offering a variety of approaches to tackling poverty.

## Background

Across the UK, social housing is provided by a combination of local authorities and Housing associations. Housing associations are non-profit organisations that provide housing for groups deemed to be in need, including people on low incomes. Social housing is provided by either housing associations or local authorities and allocated on a needs basis. Housing associations have a legacy of providing housing and services for those in poverty (or those in ‘necessitous circumstances’ as it is often defined in mission statements). The sector is diverse, with some associations tracing their routes back to 19<sup>th</sup>-century philanthropists and alms houses for widows and others in poverty, whilst newer and sometimes faster-growing associations aim principally to build more homes to rent for a widening group of households unable to afford market housing (Clarke et al., 2015). Local authorities, in contrast, tend to have less focus on poverty per se, but many manage large quantities of housing usually occupied by people unable to afford market housing.

The focus of both housing associations and local authorities has generally been on *housing* the poor rather than alleviating poverty, with a reliance on the welfare state to do the rest (Whitehead, 2015). Changes in the UK welfare environment, particularly for young people, mean that this approach is no longer viable. Private landlords usually have no mission to address poverty, but nevertheless house a large and growing proportion of low-income households in the UK, assisted by welfare payments in the form of Housing Benefit. This study therefore explored what housing providers of all types were doing to directly or indirectly address poverty amongst young people aged between 16 and 25 living outside the parental home.

Since the financial crash of 2008, the UK government has embarked on a programme of welfare reforms aiming to cut welfare expenditure, with the process accelerated after the 2010 general election when a Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government replaced an outgoing Labour one, and again in 2015 after the Conservatives achieved a majority. Alongside cross-party agreement on the need to reduce expenditure, the Conservative party has a strong belief in the need to tackle a “culture of dependency” in which welfare benefits are seen as a right. There has

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<sup>1</sup> For further details of the project, and other outputs, see [www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2014/role-housing-housing-providers-tackling-poverty-experienced-young-people-UK](http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2014/role-housing-housing-providers-tackling-poverty-experienced-young-people-UK)

also been a consistent slant of the reforms towards cutting benefits for the young but not for older people, with pensioners having thus far remained largely unaffected by cuts to benefits.

Young people who are unemployed or on a low income are generally entitled to housing benefit to help meet their housing costs. Those under 25 who rent in the private rented sector have since 1996 been restricted to the 'shared accommodation rate' of housing benefit, which means their housing benefit is capped at a level meant to cover the rent on a room in a shared house.<sup>2</sup> Since 2012 this has been extended to young single people up to the age of 35, and from 2018 it will be extended to those renting their homes from social landlords. Despite the lower rents within social housing, on average, the rents of one-bedroom flats (which young single people are currently entitled to) are considerably higher in most locations than the housing benefit shared accommodation rates. This welfare reform will reduce the range of properties that can be afforded on housing benefit; this could have an impact on poverty if young people are unable (due to insufficient stock) to find accommodation to rent within the shared accommodation rate.

Social landlords are concerned about these reforms because they want to meet the housing needs of young people but fear young tenants will be unable to afford the rent. Local authorities also have legal duties to secure accommodation for certain categories of homeless young people and rely on social housing providers being able to accommodate them, with housing benefit covering the rent if necessary.

## Ways of tackling poverty

The most basic way in which a housing provider can tackle poverty is to offer housing at a low rent. With reduced expenditure on rent, households should have higher disposable incomes to spend on other goods. However, the welfare system in the UK has meant that social landlords see very limited impact on their tenants' finances as a result of reducing rents. This is because the rent has been paid in full by housing benefit for most tenants, meaning that changes in rent levels have no impact on the disposable incomes of most tenants. Twenty-five per cent of social housing tenants in England during 2013-14 were in work and paying their rent from their earnings; the majority have their rent paid in full by Housing Benefit usually because they are pensioners, unemployed, ill or disabled or single parents caring for young children and dependent solely on welfare benefits, or because they have low earnings, which are then topped up by welfare benefits, including housing benefit to enable them to pay their rent (see EHS, 2015). This is in contrast to the role played by social housing in many other countries, where it provides a low-cost housing option for low earners (Scanlon and Whitehead, 2007).

High rents will affect the 25 per cent of tenants who do pay their own rent, and may also act as a disincentive to find work for those who are currently unemployed, but landlords were very aware

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<sup>2</sup> There are exceptions to the shared accommodation rate for care leavers aged under 22, certain categories of ex offenders who would pose risks in shared accommodation, people who have spent three or more months in a homeless hostel, and residents of certain categories of supported accommodation. These groups are currently entitled to the one-bedroom rate of Local Housing Allowance.

that most tenants would not see their disposable income increase if rents were reduced. Maximum rent increases for social landlords have been set by government at a little over inflation, and most social landlords have increased rents each year by this maximum amount with little discussion.

Social housing providers can also tackle poverty through their wider activities; this has been the preferred approach by social landlords in the UK, fitting with the social values of these providers. This approach is sometimes referred to as 'housing-plus', with housing providers aiming to support a person more holistically rather than focusing solely on housing.

## Methods

To select projects for further study we reviewed a broad range of activities run by housing providers including by means of an online survey appealing for examples, and consultation with partners to the research<sup>3</sup>. The ten projects selected are undertaking a range of approaches that illustrate the kinds of ways in which housing providers can tackle poverty, and the challenges and successes of different approaches. All the schemes were targeted at young people aged 16-25, most of whom were living outside the parental home and were spread across Great Britain.

The schemes selected employed differing combinations of three key ways of addressing poverty:

- Helping people to improve their incomes by finding work or gaining qualifications to enable them to find better-paid work.
- Helping people to manage their incomes better by provision of financial and budgeting advice and support.
- Reducing rents and thereby increasing tenants' disposable incomes for those in work.

Schemes run by housing organisations are not necessarily aimed just at their own tenants, but are often open to all young people living in the local area. Nor are they necessarily run from the housing organisation's own funds, as many apply for funding for specific schemes from funders including local authorities, charities and the government.

Researchers visited each case study project over an 18-month period and interviewed managers, frontline staff, young people using the scheme and also other agencies who referred to the schemes. The methods were decided on an individual basis to best suit the scheme, and across the 10 case studies included 51 client interviews and 13 follow-up client interviews, 18 interviews with referral agencies and two focus groups with clients.

### ***Outline of the chosen schemes***

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<sup>3</sup> These were: Housing Europe, The Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, Centrepoin and Community Housing Cymru.

The ten schemes are operated across Great Britain and comprise supported housing (with or without drop-in centres), pre-tenancy training courses and employment schemes. The majority of the schemes are aimed solely at young people. Table 1 gives an overview of the schemes studied:

*Table 1. An overview of the case study schemes chosen for the research*

Scheme name	Location	Type
<b>Pre-tenancy training schemes</b>		
MyPad	Wales – South	Pre-tenancy training; one-day course designed to prepare young people for independent living and sustaining their tenancies.
The Money House	England – London	Pre-tenancy training; 5-day course designed to prepare young people for independent living and sustaining their tenancies.
<b>Employability schemes</b>		
Traineeship	England – Midlands	Employment – Traineeships. Course designed to make young people ‘work ready’ and a precursor to finding an apprenticeship. It included a work placement and Functional Skills in English and Maths.
Community Wellbeing Apprenticeship	England – North West	Employment – Apprenticeships combined with college placement and community work. The apprenticeship was designed to make young people ‘work ready’ and lead to work or an apprenticeship.
<b>Supported housing schemes</b>		
Peer landlord	England – London	Shared housing with floating support and a lead tenant model.
SmartLets	England – Midlands	Social lettings agency. SmartLets acted as an intermediary between clients and private landlords. The housing was within Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels and included shared housing for under 35s.
New Roots	England – Midlands	Self-contained and shared housing with floating support.
Cantref Foyer	Wales – West	Supported housing.
Rock Trust	Scotland – Edinburgh	Supported housing (including shared housing with lead tenant model) and drop-in advice centre.

Denbigh Hub	Wales – North	Supported housing and drop-in advice centre.
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The schemes, either directly or indirectly, had an impact on poverty experienced by young people in three main ways.

Some schemes facilitated access to low-rent housing, or housing where the rents could be covered by welfare payments, causing a direct impact on young people’s disposable income. For instance, shared housing is usually lower rent than self-contained housing so facilitating access to shared housing could help young people to afford their rent and thereby reduce poverty. The need for single young people to access shared housing became more pressing during the course of the research as new welfare reforms were announced in late 2015 restricting young people in social housing to the housing benefit sufficient to cover the cost of shared housing, not a self-contained one-bedroom flat. This limit has been in place in the private rented sector for many years, but in 2018 will start to affect those in social housing.

Secondly, some schemes were aiming to increase young people’s earning potential so that they would be able, in the future, to find employment, or better-paid employment, and therefore reduce their poverty. This was the main aim of the two employability schemes, but there were efforts of varying degrees found in nearly all the projects to help young people access work or training opportunities.

The third way in which schemes run by housing organisations can potentially address poverty is by improving young people’s money-management skills so that they are better able to avoid high-cost debt and to spend their money efficiently. This was a major focus of the two tenancy training courses, and also part of the work of the supported housing schemes.

The table below shows the main focus of each of the schemes in terms of these three ways of addressing poverty:

Scheme name	Type	Low rents	Increased earnings	Money management and life skills
MyPad	Pre-tenancy training		√	√
The Money House	Pre-tenancy training			√
Traineeship	Employment – Traineeships		√	√
Community Wellbeing Apprenticeship	Employment – Apprenticeships		√	√
Peer Landlord	Shared housing with lead tenant and floating support	√	√	√

SmartLets	Social lettings agency	√		√
New Roots	Self contained and shared housing with floating support		√	√
Cantref Foyer	Supported housing		√	√
Rock Trust	Housing with floating support (including shared housing with lead tenant model) and drop-in advice centre	√	√	√
Denbigh Hub	Supported housing and drop-in advice centre		√	√

## Key successes and challenges for each of the ten case studies

### MyPad in Newport, Wales

#### Overview

The MyPad scheme was established with the aim to prepare young people for living independently and to help them to sustain their tenancies. The project is led by Seren and also involves other social landlords in the area (Newport City Homes, Charter Housing, Melin Homes and Linc-Cymru) and Newport Council as partners. Discussions to run the scheme started in autumn 2011, with a pilot of the scheme in October 2012. The scheme started in November 2012.

At start up, each of the social landlord partners paid a proportion of the costs, based on the amount of stock held in Newport. Additional funding came from Supporting People (for set-up costs and running the pilot) and Newport Council. This funding arrangement came to an end in 2015. The course is now funded solely between the scheme partners. The largest cost of the scheme was staffing, which has been reduced; instead of one staff member employed by MyPad to oversee the scheme, the partners share this role amongst their existing staff, with one coordinator (extending their existing role). This change has halved the cost of the project.

MyPad is a one-day course run once per month (except December) at the Seren offices, with breakfast and lunch provided for attendees. Attendees receive a work booklet which, if they complete it, is sent off to earn a tenancy skills certificate (certified as worth two credits by the company, Agored). They also receive a handbook (designed by past attendees) and a £10 Argos voucher.

The course focuses on independent living skills, including budgeting, the rights and responsibilities linked to tenancies, and setting up and paying bills. The afternoon of the course

involves visiting a vacant property to show attendees the likely state of a property they could move into, to facilitate discussions of moving and housing set-up costs.

### **Key successes**

- The MyPad course develops the independent living skills wanted by young people, such as money management, setting up and paying utilities, and the rights and responsibilities of a tenant:

*“It was really helpful because it shows us what to do with bills. They gave us a catalogue and said ‘what would you pick, what would you need?’ and we added up a total at the end. We had to figure out how much money we’re earning and see how that fitted in with how much we’d pay for water and gas and everything. They helped us with how to manage money as well.” (Attendee)*

*“I wanted to know all about furnishing your flat, obviously you learn stuff about the money you need, what money goes where, bill management and what you have when you actually go into your new flat and how to get it.” (Non-attendee)*

- The visit to a vacant property (and associated activities) is a particularly useful element of the course; it helps to manage the expectations of young people about the likely state of a property and the furnishing costs involved.
- The practical and informal style of delivery works well; the course involves activities to engage young people and requires them to actively consider the implications of living independently.
- The scheme leaders have taken a flexible approach to the structure and delivery of the course to boost attendance; there have been changes to the length and timing of the course and the use of incentives. The course is used by young people who are difficult to engage with; some were apathetic towards the value of courses, many were undergoing significant life changes and many were difficult to contact.
- The course provides a much needed service; it is the only pre-tenancy training course in the local area.
- There is a quick turnaround time between referral and being offered a place on a course:

*“It’s a fairly quick turnaround [from referral to attending the course], so she wasn’t on a waiting list forevermore, she was contacted within a fortnight, she had an initial appointment within three weeks and started the course within the month; that was important to her, it all worked out well for her.” (Referral agency)*
- The social landlord partners in MyPad have developed good working relationships through the scheme. This is seen as a positive development; the local social landlords had not worked together very much before and there had been a competitive environment. There are hopes that the closer working on the MyPad scheme may extend to joint efforts in other areas in the future.

### **Challenges**

- The course sometimes struggled to ensure the attendance of those who were booked onto it. Of those young people who were scheduled to attend the course but did not (and who could be contacted), the main reason was because of miscommunication between referrers, MyPad and the young person. Several non-attendees did not know the date of the course they were booked onto. Other examples include someone being contacted by MyPad to say the course had been cancelled and not being told a course had been booked (they had discussed MyPad with a referral agency, but did were not told a place had been secured). Clearer communication with the young person by MyPad and the referral agency could address this confusion. However, the experience from this research suggests that contacting young people personally can be problematic. This is an area that MyPad are working to improve; there is now a MyPad coordinator to ensure effective communication with referral agencies and clients.
- Other young people did not attend the course because their home situation had improved so they no longer needed to move. One young person noted that the cost of transport to the venue could not be met.
- The local Council were reluctant to make the course compulsory for young people accessing social housing, something that the MyPad scheme leaders were keen to pursue. The scheme leaders thought that by making MyPad compulsory for young people attendance would improve and the numbers attending each course would be more reliable. The Council raised concerns about this to scheme leaders on the basis of equality (why should young people in the area have to attend a pre-tenancy training course, when other client groups did not?).
- MyPad made ongoing efforts to encourage referrals from supported housing for young people, though found this to take time. MyPad tries to promote awareness of the course amongst support workers at young people's housing schemes, but staff turnover can be high and there can be clashing working styles. Some support workers do not recognise the added value of MyPad, compared with the support they already offer to young people in housing schemes.
- Of the young people who participated in the research, few had an immediate or near-future intention to move into independent accommodation. Of those considering a move, the majority were planning to move between hostels rather than to independent accommodation.

## **The Money House in Greenwich, London**

### **Overview**

Hyde established the Money House in response to the Big Lottery's Improving Financial Confidence Programme. This was a funding source available only in 60 identified areas, of which Greenwich was one. The projects had to have the support of the LA, but not to be led by it. This meant organisations had to work together to put in a bid supported by the Royal Borough

of Greenwich. The Money House consists of a partnership between the Hyde Group, the Royal Borough of Greenwich, Greenwich CAB, Meridian Money Advice, MyBank and the YMCA.

The scheme is funded until the end of December 2016 (3 years and 9 months altogether). Hyde is currently working on succession planning.

The Money House delivers a five-day training course to 16-24 year-olds, from a first floor flat in Woolwich. The course runs from around 10.30 to 3pm each day and courses are run three weeks per month. During the 4<sup>th</sup> week they run two separate one-day courses, aimed mainly at working people who can't attend the full week. Less needy young people will also sometimes attend the one-day courses. The Money House also uses the flat to run training events for support workers (social workers who work with care leavers and other agencies) to help them understand what the scheme does and encourage them to refer participants.

The training focuses on living independently, banking, borrowing, income, budgeting, debt management and benefits, and helps the participants set goals for how they spend and save their money. It also teaches them how to read an electricity meter, plus skills for shopping on a budget and cooking.

### **Key successes**

- Participants who attend the first day of the course almost always stay the full week, suggesting that they enjoy it and find it useful:

*“There are two things they tell us about it: one is that they’re surprised, they’re expecting to go to a teaching environment and to be lectured – so it’s a surprise to them that it’s different. The other is that a lot of them think they know everything, they’ve been brought up on the hard streets ‘and there’s nothing you can tell me that I don’t already know’, and they find a whole range of things that they realise they knew nothing at all about.”* (Referral agency)

- The scheme has been able to meet demand and young people wanting to go on the course can always be accommodated.
- Staff who delivered the course appeared skilled at engaging young people and participants liked them.
- Participants enjoyed the Money House, and in almost all cases found that it exceeded their expectations. Most had only attended because they were told they had to, but nevertheless felt with hindsight that they were glad they had:

*“The people are good. You learn and you get to eat there. It’s comfy. But it’s fun. Even though you need to learn you enjoy it.”* (Participant)

- Participants often had past negative experiences of school and classroom-style learning. By basing the Money House in a real flat with informal seating and learning-style participants were engaged and appreciated that this was “not like school”:

*“It wasn’t like school, there were games.”*

*“I enjoyed the actual course – lots of images on the Powerpoints, not too much text, lots of discussions.” (Attendees)*

*“It works so much better than just sitting down and telling them how to pay rent and set up a standing order – it’s more fun and meaningful, and has a larger impact.” (Referral agency)*

- Close integration with Leaving Care teams and the housing allocation team at the local authority mean that young people do attend the course because it is effectively required to be considered a priority for council housing. A similar scheme we looked at was struggling with attendance to a greater extent because it did not have this degree of enforcement.
- The option of completing a shorter course in one day means that it is still accessible to young people in work or in education.
- Some of the course content seemed useful even before young people had moved on, especially the content around budgeting, and in some cases this may improve prospects of moving on:

*“I’m going to start bidding [for council housing] soon. I needed to pay off my service charge [for current accommodation]. I’ve done that now, since going on course. They don’t put you forward for bidding until it’s paid.” (Attendee)*

- The scheme has worked effectively with young people who are anxious about attending groups, for instance because of gang-related fears or mental health difficulties, by considering the makeup of each group carefully and on occasion offering bespoke one-to-one training instead. This has been achieved by a flexible approach to delivery and close working with referral agencies, who are invited to attend a sample session at the Money House to see what it is like.
- Widening the scheme to include young people looking for housing in the private rented sector (PRS) has the potential to increase uptake.

## **Challenges**

- The course has struggled at times to get young people to turn up. Interviews with young people suggested that this may be in part because young people are told the course is compulsory and so agree to be referred onto the course but simply don’t turn up if they do not wish to do it.
- Agencies working with young people likely to move to the PRS, or outside Greenwich, found it hard to get them to attend the course, because there was no clear requirement for them to do so as there was for those seeking priority bidding status for social housing:

*“Greenwich Council Housing from the very start were willing to wield a big stick, and that’s a huge incentive, and that’s not available in Lewisham. If other councils wanted to achieve significant take up they need that kind of incentive.”*

*Otherwise people just don't attend. That's the single biggest factor that makes the Money House work." (Referral agency)*

- Young people did not always attend the course at the point when they were ready to move on to independent housing. Most of those followed up by phone three months later were living in the same place they were living when they had attended the course and still waiting to be housed by the council. The delays would appear to be down to their social worker or accommodation provider not yet having approved their priority bidding status, or because they themselves did not feel they were quite ready yet. They did still appreciate many aspects of the course but those that focused on the tenancy-related aspects may have been forgotten by the time they are needed. Participants were generally unaware how long it was likely to take to be offered a flat.
- One referral agency stated that it was under pressure to refer people to the Money House within three months of starting to house them, but found that they were not always ready to move on this soon. Rules on attendance have recently been relaxed to allow people to attend a second time if they become more ready to move on and it is thought that they would benefit from attending, but a more flexible approach about when to first attend may help ensure the course is well targeted.
- When asked what else they would find useful on the course some participants mentioned practice at making phone calls.
- Most participants are looking to move to one-bedroom council flats. Most are not in work and are reliant on housing benefit and therefore likely to find it difficult to afford their rent when the housing benefit for social tenants is capped at LHA levels from April 2018, unless they have found work by then. The PRS is not an attractive option for most participants because of high rents.
- Most participants were not in work and many were not yet thinking about work. Some were looking instead for voluntary work or very part-time work, which could take time to lead to anything paying enough to get them out of poverty. There wasn't a big focus on finding work in the course, or on plans for longer-term financial security.
- The course is well funded currently, at levels which may be hard to replicate when the current funding source ends. However, some participants and referral agencies felt that a whole week was a long time to give up, especially if young people were in education and having to use their holiday time, and that the course could be covered in a shorter period of time, which may offer one way to run the course more cheaply.
- There was some interest in whether the course could run for older people but referral agencies and participants were often of the view that young people felt more confident when among their peers. One participant who was slightly older than the others felt that he knew a lot of the content already, suggesting that widening the age group may be problematic.

## EMH Traineeships in Coalville, Leicestershire

### Overview

EMH (a Housing Association) ran a full-time, nine-week Traineeship for people aged 16-24 who were unemployed and did not have qualifications above GCSE level. The scheme was developed in reaction to a feeling amongst businesses that they are struggling to recruit people with the applied business skills that they need. In addition, there was concern that employers should be recognised for their contributions to training and supporting young people in employment. The Traineeship dovetails into the longer-standing Apprenticeship scheme; the Traineeships run before the recruitment for apprentices begins, giving trainees the opportunity to develop their work skills and be supported to make an application (if this is appropriate). The scheme is not employment and the trainees are not paid, though they are given £7 per day for subsistence.

The Traineeship has run twice, first in 2014 and then in 2015. The second phase was examined for this case study, with seven young people attending. The Traineeship is funded from within EMH Group and costs £45,000; EMH Group views funding the scheme as part of its 'profit for purpose' approach by investing in the local community. All of the trainees were referred through the local JobCentre. Cuts to government funding and rent freezes in the housing association's core business have meant that EMH Group are not funding this scheme for 2016.

The Traineeship consists of employability skills training, functional skills qualifications in Maths and English and a work placement. EMH delivers the employability skills training and provides appropriate work placements (one placement per trainee). The functional skills element of the Traineeship is delivered by a partner college (Loughborough College for the 2014 scheme and Leicester College for 2015), using applied examples. The ethos of the scheme is to provide training in a working environment and develop work-based skills. In addition, trainees visit different streams of the EMH business and undertake jobs skills training, such as searching and applying for jobs and interview technique.

### Key successes

- The scheme leader and the local JobCentre Plus worked well together to encourage and support applications from appropriate candidates. The scheme leader also worked well with the local college delivering the Functional Skills training to encourage an applied approach.
- The scheme leader was highly regarded by the trainees; he was enthusiastic and encouraged, supported and motivated the trainees to succeed. The trainees were pushed out of their comfort zones, with support, and were proud of their achievements (such as public speaking) for this reason.

*"[End of Traineeship event, speech to room of people 50-60] I wasn't actually that nervous! There was about 50 or 60 people in this room and because they watched a video of us [recorded] on the first day of the Traineeship [and compared it] to what we are now. Everyone else was nervous, but me and*

*[another trainee] weren't, we were fine actually. I was surprised I was confident!"*  
(Client)

*"We had the presentation yesterday [awards/end of Traineeship event] and we'd been practising [speeches] for about four days. At first I was quite nervous and quite shy and didn't really want to look up, I was more looking down all the time, looking at the speech. But, as time went on, my head started going from down to going up talking, looking down to see where I were and then talking again. It's made my confidence go through the roof, to be fair, I could do it again and again."* (Client)

- The trainees felt supported through the scheme by the scheme leader and by their peers. The scheme fostered a team atmosphere amongst the trainees and support was intensive on group and one-to-one bases.

*"With me I'll read something and think 'yeah, I know that', but then I actually don't read properly what the questions are and it's like, at the minute I'm just applying for a job and one of the other trainees has actually come and sat next to me and said 'do you want a hand?'."* (Client)

- Trainees enjoyed the practical and applied style of the course – learning in a business setting and completing 'real world' tasks.
- The timing of the Traineeship was well thought through to give trainees the opportunity to apply for the EMH Apprenticeships.
- The educational outcomes of the Traineeship were excellent – all of the trainees passed the Functional Skills English and Maths exams (one trainee did not sit the exam as he already held formal Maths and English qualifications). In contrast to the mid-stage interviews, trainees gained confidence in their Maths and English abilities and valued the opportunity to gain these qualifications.

*"The way I've progressed in my Maths and English, but Maths more, I never thought I'd be able to do what I can do now in Maths. When I was at school I was a bit, didn't really care about Maths, skipped the lessons or messed about and like, graphs for example, I didn't even know what they were in school! Since I've been on here and over the nine weeks going Maths with [tutor], I can do graphs, I can do percentages, which I've never been able to do! But now I can do those things."* (Client)

- The outcomes of trainees relating to work were very positive; four trainees started apprenticeships (one with EMH), one enrolled on a work programme and one had found employment in his area of interest. This is particularly significant as the trainees were a challenging group to make 'work ready'; the trainees had a lack of qualifications and work experience and one was precariously housed. The referral agency highlighted that the trainees were unlikely to have found work otherwise:

*“It was people who perhaps still would have been with us now, had it not been – in fact I’m sure quite a few would have still been with us – had they not gone and done that [the Traineeship].” (Referral agency)*

- The trainees noted a range of positive personal outcomes from the traineeship, including increased confidence, improved wellbeing, increased motivation, a sense of achievement (and pride in this), friendship and improved interpersonal skills.

*“It’s easier to talk to more people because my confidence has got better since last time.” (Client)*

*“My confidence has boosted up a lot more and I’m more confident about talking to people, like asking them questions and giving the right answers and I don’t get as nervous.” (Client)*

*“It’s given me such a widened vocabulary, it’s given me, I don’t know, everything. Just being professional and presenting yourself well in front of a potential employer.” (Client)*

## **Challenges**

- The trainees commented that the course was not what they expected – they thought it would be like school. This could mean that the traineeship was not advertised on its strength of being applied or not explained fully at the point of application.
- The trainees had variable experiences of the work placements – in one case, a trainee noted that the placement team were not prepared for their visit and they were not given enough to do:

*“When I got there I felt they weren’t prepared for me at all and it was just ‘what odd jobs can we give him’, which was literally what they said!” (Client)*

- Whilst the Traineeships were carefully timed to end when recruitment for the Apprenticeships opened, the work placements did not necessarily coincide with the Apprenticeships. Some trainees were disappointed that they could not apply for the Apprenticeships because they did not relate to their work placement.

## **Regenda’s Community Wellbeing Apprenticeships in Liverpool**

### **Overview**

Regenda (a housing association) ran a full-time, one-year Apprenticeship (April to April) for people aged 16-17 who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), with 14 apprentices. This is the second apprenticeship run by Regenda; the first was run over two years (2013-2015) for people aged 16-24 living in the Anfield or Everton areas of Liverpool. The scheme was developed out of concern about record youth unemployment and as a way to meet Regenda’s target of helping 200 young people get into work. Apprentices are employed by Regenda and paid the age-related national minimum wage, which is more than the national

apprenticeship wage. This scheme (run over two years) was solely funded by Regenda as part of their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations at a cost of around £400,000.

The second version of the Apprenticeship, examined for this case study, was funded by Regenda, another local housing association, Liverpool City Council and a donation from a local business; the Apprenticeship received £150,000 in funding. There are no firm plans to run the Apprenticeship again.

The apprentices spent two days per week on community initiatives, two days per week on a work placement of their choosing and one day per week at college, on a course relevant to their work placement. Work placements were individually tailored to the apprentice and based on their 'dream job'; this resulted in a wide variety of placements, from hairdressing to plumbing and business administration to retail. Personal development sessions were included in the Apprenticeship throughout the year to develop work-related and soft skills (such as confidence and team working). Regenda arranges the community initiatives and local businesses host the apprentices on work placements. The apprentices complete their college course at one of several local colleges (the choice of college is dependent on the type of course chosen and the availability of part-time courses).

### **Key successes**

- The 'dream job' element of the Apprenticeship encouraged young people to apply for the scheme – both the young people and the referral agency highlighted this. It gave the apprentices the opportunity to try something they were genuinely interested in and that was tailored to them. The referral agency noted that this was unusual in the local job market and a 'unique selling point' for potential recruits.
- The scheme leader developed good links with local employers, and a different set of businesses from the previous Apprenticeship scheme, to find appropriate placements for the apprentices.
- The apprentices enjoyed, and saw the value of, the community work element of the Apprenticeship. This enjoyment seemed to develop over the Apprenticeship – possibly as the tasks varied from one month to the next, the apprentices became more confident in carrying out the work and had more opportunities to suggest activities.
- The Apprenticeship fostered a team atmosphere amongst the apprentices and the scheme leaders; the apprentices felt supported. The apprentices noted that the group got on well and provided a good environment to work in.
- The apprentices varied in terms of educational attainment and experience of employment. Whilst the majority had completed secondary education with few qualifications, others had either not completed secondary education or had a good range of GCSEs. None of the apprentices had experience of sustained, full-time employment; some had worked in temporary or contract jobs.
- The scheme leaders motivated, encouraged and managed a diverse group of young people well. This was likely challenging as the group was relatively large and lively.

*“Sometimes we have team meetings on a Monday and Kev gives us all constructive criticism or good criticism – what we’ve been doing good and what we can improve on – so that’s supporting me, isn’t it, it’s making me feel that I need to ‘up my game’ from last time and know what I can do to make things better.”* (Client)

- The scheme leaders allowed the apprentices to ‘have a say’ in the activities they undertook; several apprentices noted this and saw it as a chance to take some responsibility, be creative and have their ideas valued. This opportunity represented, to some, that they were in an ‘adult’ job, where they were trusted and listened to:

*“I’m more mature, I feel like an ‘adult’, not like a kid because I’m not just being told what to do, I’m thinking about what to do; putting my own idea across about how we can change the community. I’ve got a say; you know how people say that kids don’t have a say, but I feel like I’ve got a say in this job.”* (Client)

- The apprentices interviewed two weeks before the end of the apprenticeship were ‘work-ready’ and the majority were actively seeking work (making job applications) or had secured future employment.

*“I’m a thousand times more confident. I’ve got loads more skills. I’ve got a better mindset about work as well, more punctual.”* (Client)

- Apprentices mentioned a range of positive personal outcomes from the Apprenticeship, including increased confidence, improved wellbeing (and, in some cases, mental health), increased motivation and a sense of achievement (and pride in this).

*“I feel I’ve got more control of my life... now I feel happy, happy working... I feel like I’m not just going to be lazy and not get a job after this, I’m going to make sure that there’s a job lined up for after this.”* (Client)

*“[I’ve got more] confidence and I’ve got new skills, like speaking out in public – I was dead shy when I started, but now I’m quite confident.”* (Client)

*“[As a result of the Apprenticeship] compared to people I know, I’ve got more money, more stability and more chances of getting further than them, I’ve got more qualifications.”* (Client)

## **Challenges**

- The ‘dream job’ placement and college could not always be arranged; this seemed to be due either to apprentices choosing a niche area or to a lack of suitable college courses. Almost all of the apprentices had changed their ‘dream job’ and placement during the year; it is good that the Community Wellbeing Apprenticeship could be flexible about this, but the colleges could not be as flexible.
- Some of the changing of placements initiated by apprentices seemed to indicate some confusion over the role of the placement – were the placements envisaged as a route into employment with that business, or as good work experience from which they could gain a reference? The majority of apprentices saw the placement as an informal route

into employment with the business, so when this looked unlikely or they changed their minds about the type of work they wanted, the placement was dropped.

- The timing of the Apprenticeship, to fit with funding cycles, clashed with the academic year. Apprentices did not start college courses, if at all, until about halfway through the Apprenticeship. Furthermore, some apprentices started college courses after the formal start of the course and could only attend a couple of sessions before the course concluded. As a result, very few apprentices intended to complete their college courses as these ran past the end of the Apprenticeship (the main exception to this was apprentices who had been offered a position with their placement company).
- The possible implications of paying the non-apprentice minimum wage to apprentices were seemingly not explored. Depending on age, the Community Wellbeing Apprentices may be paid less if they enter into a further apprenticeship; this could affect the type of employment that the Community Wellbeing Apprentices are willing to apply for, which may not be as beneficial for their career prospects long-term.

## Catch 22's Peer Landlord scheme in London

### Overview

The Peer Landlord scheme is a pilot scheme offering low-cost private accommodation for vulnerable people, in partnership with Commonweal Housing.

A 'peer landlord' is trained to act as landlord for the housing association, Catch 22, to ensure the property is managed appropriately and to be the first point of contact for enquiries and issues. The aim is to equip peer landlords with skills that will aid them in future careers – many have stated aspirations in social care and support.

The average rent charged to Catch22 is £440 per month *per property*. Tenants pay around £400 per month *per room*, with several rooms per house, meaning that there is sufficient income generated from the rent paid to pay the rent due to Commonweal and also to cover the support costs. Commonweal recognises that this level of subsidy is not replicable in any form and is pushing the delivery partners to consider whether the project can be delivered at a lower cost. The rents paid by tenants are very low compared with local market rents of around £1300 per month, and the scheme is considering whether rents can be lowered further by converting living rooms into bedrooms in some of the properties, or by asking tenants to take responsibility for upkeep of the garden.

The scheme comprises six properties offering 18 bed spaces in Haringey, Greenwich and Lewisham. Turnover rates are low and most residents have been there over a year as they can stay as long as they like. The scheme does work with clients to help them apply for council housing and does not permit partners to move in, which encourages some to move on. In the last year, four tenants have left, and two new tenants have moved in. There were two vacancies at the time of the initial interview.

Because of the low turnover, the scheme does not hold a waiting list but instead contacts the local authority housing department or social services' Leaving Care team when a space arises for them to suggest a referral. The potential housemates will also be given a chance to meet the nominee to check they are happy with them.

### **Key successes**

- The low rents charged to tenants allow them to escape poverty by working. A small number who have moved out in the past year have gone on to purchase a home, which should offer them good financial security in the future.
- A high proportion of tenants are in work or full-time education, which creates a culture in the shared houses where working or studying full time is normal.
- The peer landlord model ensures that the landlord has a clear line of communication to tenants in the house, and tenants valued this role:

*“He [the peer landlord] is responsible for reporting maintenance issues. And he checks on us – if we’ve not been home for a few days – he’d call me up. I like that, it’s very nice.”*

- Young people value the security of being able to stay as long as they like and move on when their financial or domestic circumstances facilitated this.
- The project has successfully placed young people from different backgrounds in mixed-gender shared houses, and they have lived well together. The tenants interviewed generally preferred living with others around their own age.
- The tenants did not have high support needs but did appreciate support at times when they wanted it and to help resolve any conflicts in the house:

*“[The support worker] talks about everything really – she tells me about courses, or things going on. It’s like having a mum that comes to check on you! But she’s still very professional too, extremely helpful. If we have an issue she always helps us to resolve the issue.”*

- The referring agency felt that the project offered a good balance of support and independence which was very appropriate for care leavers in their late teens:

*“Young people don’t like supported housing because the workers are there. Outreach support is more appealing. They feel that at 18/19 they are an adult. They want to feel like an adult and they’ve often moved around a lot so want somewhere they can call home. The peer landlord scheme is like an adult flat share. The support is there but it’s more subtle.”*

### **Challenges**

- It is hard to see how the scheme could work financially without the substantial in-kind subsidy in the form of low-rent housing, especially in a London context.

- Low rents in a London context give tenants little incentive to move out. This means the project is unable to take very many new referrals and therefore helps only small numbers of new people per year.
- Most of the residents are able to sustain employment and appear to need only low levels of support, if any. The project was unable to accept referrals from young people with higher levels of need or high-risk behaviour.
- Dispersed stock means that supporting tenants or peer landlords can be time-intensive.
- If a peer landlord leaves the scheme they have to ask another tenant to take on these duties, and other tenants may not always be keen or suitable. Imposing a new housemate on a house with the status of peer landlord may not be an easy solution either.
- Some tenants were unclear about how their rent account worked and complained of being told they were in arrears when they believed they were not. A lack of understanding of how much the rent was and how it was paid was found to be a challenge for many projects working with young people in receipt of housing benefit or other forms of state support, and limits their ability to understand how they can improve their financial situation.
- Staff turnover had created some confusion among tenants around who to contact for support or housing management.

## SmartLets in Worcester

### Overview

SmartLets is a social lettings agency set up by Worcester Citizens Advice Bureau and Worcester Housing and Benefits Advice Centre, in partnership with the local authority and the housing charity Crisis in 2011. SmartLets was set up after the scheme leaders attended a conference for housing providers to share knowledge, organised by Crisis. A presentation was given by a social lettings agency in Derby and it was decided to replicate this in Worcester.

SmartLets is a charity, not a housing association, and works with landlords from the PRS. It offers a range of packages to landlords. At the highest end, SmartLets guarantees rent to landlords (even if there are voids), carries out repairs on the property, selects and manages tenants and deals with evictions. Alternatively, SmartLets can manage properties for a percentage of the rent or find tenants for a fee, and employs project workers and a property manager to help with this aspect of the scheme. SmartLets now has 25 properties (35 units of accommodation) with a roughly equal split between self-contained and shared accommodation; the shared accommodation was the focus of the case study as the self-contained accommodation was predominantly occupied by clients aged 35 or over. One of the shared properties is a bungalow for non-resident fathers. This property was previously supported living for people with brain injuries and includes a self-contained suite for a staff member. Now, non-resident fathers have their own room and the suite is used for when their children visit.

At the time of the fieldwork for the case study, SmartLets received funding from a range of sources. Crisis provided long-term funding of £60,000 per year in addition to Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council and John Martin's charity. SmartLets underwent extensive funding changes during the course of the case study fieldwork; as of April 2016 the funding from Crisis finished (planned end to fixed-term funding), the funding from the local authority was reduced and Supporting People funding for substance misusers was stopped. SmartLets had always aimed to be self-funding, and the long-term Crisis funding was part of this aim (to allow them time to become self-funding). SmartLets has a 'healthy' surplus and still has funding from other sources. SmartLets will use its reserves for the next 12 months and the scheme leads are exploring other grants and charities for further funding.

SmartLets tenants must be 18 or over, be homeless or vulnerably housed and have no dependents. Most SmartLets tenants are male and White-British. Rent in shared accommodation is low; rent and utilities is within LHA limits. Those living in shared accommodation (which is supported accommodation) are referred to the local authority for housing, usually after six months. SmartLets tenants have support workers and access to advice on issues such as benefits, budgeting and transitions to work.

### **Key successes**

- SmartLets provides a highly valued service in the local area, filling a gap in provision for those who did not meet 'priority need' criteria for help with housing.

*"We'd all be stuffed without SmartLets."* (Client)

- SmartLets make innovative use of property; the bungalow for non-resident fathers is an excellent example of what can be done.
- SmartLets provides appropriate support (both in terms of the types and levels of support available) on group and individual bases. The support is flexible to the needs of the tenant, with on-demand as well as scheduled availability.

*"I mean they've been so good with me, it's been absolutely fantastic, the service has been amazing, they're always really willing to help and if the person you're expecting to speak to isn't there then somebody else will sort you out straight away. I've been introduced to most of the staff that work there so I know most of the staff that work at SmartLets by name anyway. It's really, really good."* (Client)

- The SmartLets service and its support workers encourage and support the employment of tenants. The rent is low, removing barriers and incentivising employment, and tenants are supported through the transition to work (for example, where this affects benefit entitlements).
- SmartLets takes a sensible approach to the payment of rent. Some tenants deliberately overpaid their rent to act as savings in case they could not pay the full amount in future (linked to concerns over loss of employment or reduced pay from employment). Another tenant noted that he was supported through rent arrears, with affordable repayments, when he had unexpected, necessary outgoings.

*“[My benefits entitlements changed] and there was unfortunately a bit of a problem switching my claim over so it meant I had a few weeks where I didn’t have any money. But I went down to SmartLets, explained to them the situation and I was unfortunately not going to be able to pay my top-up for a few weeks and they were completely fine with it. ...they are very supportive and very understanding as long as I communicate with them what’s going on then they’re very understanding about it.” (Client)*

- The SmartLets shared housing helped to manage the expectations of tenants regarding the likelihood of future, self-contained housing and gave valuable experience of living in shared housing with support in managing issues with housemates.
- For those tenants who participated in the research, sharing was a generally positive experience with links to friendship and increased wellbeing.
- Tenants valued the SmartLets service, seeing it as a positive opportunity in a period of crisis; SmartLets was seen as a reprieve and a stepping stone to independent living.

*“Schemes like this are worthwhile because there are people out there who do need that bit of help and support because they haven’t got family or friends who can help them or support them and it is a really good way, using it as a stepping stone to get themselves in a position where most people want to be, which is having their own place, being able to live the life they want to live and go on from there.” (Client)*

*“It’s all been really positive for me, to be honest, it’s actually really helped me get out of the rut I was in last year and sort of make progress with my life.” (Client)*

## **Challenges**

- Some tenants noted the slow resolution of maintenance issues, though they did highlight that this was due to the landlords’ reluctance, not slow reporting from SmartLets. SmartLets noted that most landlords were quick to respond to maintenance issues, but others were not (and this was out of their control).
- Tenants noted the lack of internet access in shared properties; the general consensus was that they would be willing to pay slightly more rent to cover this facility. Whilst most were reticent to say that internet access was a necessity, they highlighted the internet as the default way to search and apply for jobs, bid on properties and communicate with services. Providing internet access in shared housing has been considered by SmartLets, but decided against; there were concerns that some tenants should not have access to the internet because of past issues (raised in police checks).
- Some tenants mentioned issues with the strict house rules for shared properties, including no overnight guests and weekly house meetings. This is noted cautiously, however, as tenants were pleased with the support on offer and the role of the weekly meetings in addressing housemate issues.

- Since the feedback from the fieldwork and its own experience, SmartLets is going to trial relaxing the house rules in the more settled shared houses, starting in one property.
- Some tenants were concerned about future housemate dynamics; whilst most did not have housemate issues, they were aware that there was a potential for this with new housemates and highlighted that they had no choice in this.
- Since the feedback from the fieldwork, SmartLets is going to trial the greater involvement of existing housemates in the selection of new housemates (but the format of this involvement was not decided).

## New Roots housing in Nottinghamshire

### Overview

New Roots is a charity that provides supported housing for young people; new tenants are usually aged 18 or under or case leavers aged 21 or under. The scheme was set up in 1993 in recognition of homeless young people and a lack of specialised support. New Roots collaborates with Nottinghamshire Community Housing Association (NCHA) for tendering purposes.

New Roots has 36 units of accommodation; of these, eight are owned by New Roots and the remainder are managed properties. At the start of the fieldwork for the case study, New Roots received funding from a range of sources; from rents (Housing Benefit), Nottingham County Council, Children in Need, the Henry Smith charity and the National Lottery. At this point, New Roots accepted referrals from different agencies and young people could self-refer. New funding arrangements started in summer 2015, with increased (and longer-term) funding from Nottinghamshire County Council and referrals coming via Children's Services.

New Roots provides individually tailored support plans, which are reviewed regularly and on demand. There is support available for issues including income maximisation, debt reduction, substance misuse and relationship breakdowns. New Roots tenants can be single people, families or single parents, with the majority of tenants in self-contained accommodation. New Roots helps tenants to develop independent living skills; two AQA Lifewise units must be completed whilst in supported accommodation. Over half of New Roots tenants move on to social housing, with the remainder moving back to family, going to university or into private rented accommodation.

### Key successes

- New Roots is flexible to changing personal circumstances (such as partners wanting to live full-time or part-time with a tenant), which was appreciated by tenants. Partners of tenants are offered support and are welcomed at group activities.

*"It's a really good service, it's really, really good. If you're nice to them, they're nice to you. If you're not nice to them, they'll still be nice to you. No matter what happens, they'll always be there to help you out."* (Partner of client)

- New Roots provides opportunities for young people to gain experience for employment through volunteering, providing valuable references as part of this.
- New Roots offers a wide range of group activities and trips for young people; the tenants who participated in the research had all attended activities and trips and enjoyed these. These activities helped to build peer support amongst tenants and make them feel 'settled in'.
- New Roots tenants mentioned a range of personal outcomes from being part of the scheme, including increased confidence and wellbeing (including mental health, in some cases).

*"We're happier... we get out more, we're able to get out more."* (Client)

*"[Knowing that support is available, has meant that] I don't have to sit and worry about it [the issue]."* (Client)

- New Roots has a flexible approach to moving on; tenants were aware of time limits on their access to the services, but also believed that New Roots would not move them on until they were ready for independent living.

### **Challenges**

- Some tenants noted that, at times, the number of visits could be overwhelming; this was often in cases where multiple agencies were involved with a young person, all with scheduled (and unexpected) visits.
- The high rent was a barrier to employment; one tenant noted that it was 'too risky' to work as their rent was unlikely to be covered by Housing Benefit.
- Some tenants noted that New Roots was slow to address maintenance issues; however, it was not always clear from the tenants' explanation whether their concerns had been 'officially' reported or just mentioned in conversation with a member of staff (with them for another purpose). On further discussion with New Roots, the owners of the managed units can be slow to carry out maintenance; with one particular large social landlord maintenance is reported through a cumbersome centralised system and the work is then contracted out. There can be a lack of understanding that New Roots is supported housing; contractors turn up unexpected and young people are worried and sometimes turn them away. On occasion, young people report maintenance issues very informally (possibly as part of a support meeting) and this is not picked up by the support worker and therefore not reported properly.

## Cantref Foyer in Ceredigion, Wales

### Overview

The Foyer developed from existing temporary housing provision run by Cantref, gaining Foyer recognition at the end of 2014. However, the local authority has 100% nomination rights to the scheme, and therefore the scheme has to be more flexible than the normal Foyer requirement that the young people should be in work or training, and instead requires that the young people be in need of, and engage with, support.

The scheme consists of three converted terraced houses providing a total of 20 rooms for 16-25 year olds. One property, Ty Cerrig, is staffed and provides six rooms, another provides five rooms, and a third has been split into nine self-contained flats. In general, young people are housed first at Ty Cerrig, before moving on to the five-room house and then to one of the self contained flats.

The scheme is funded from Housing Benefit and Supporting People grants. The flats have a lower rent (£90 per week), so the scheme tries to move young people on to these if they are in work, so as to make it more affordable.

The scheme receives between 30 and 40 new referrals each year: the young people can stay for up to two years (the maximum allowed by Supported People funding), but some will leave and then return, sometimes more than once, before they are ready to live independently. Most move on to general needs housing, either from the Council or in the PRS via a bond scheme run by the Ceredigion Care Society.

There are five project workers based at Ty Cerrig, and these provide support to the young people, including some resettlement support to those moving out of the scheme. The young people in the scheme are required to do at least six hours of structured activities each week, and the support workers go round the houses to ensure that the young people are awake in the mornings.

### Key successes

- The project has good relationships with local authority housing and leaving care functions, availability of move-on accommodation, and backing from the deposit scheme run by the Ceredigion Care Society.
- There is a low drop out rate with most young people staying until a planned move on occurs.
- Each young person is assigned a Support Worker to agree individual goals and activities – making sure that the young people get up in the mornings is a critical part of this.
- Move-on, from the supervised shared house at Ty Cerrig to the unsupervised shared house to the self contained flats, appears to work effectively.
- There is some evidence of significant progress by some residents, going on to university or college, or setting up small businesses.

## Challenges

- The scheme is the only significant resource for the age group available to the local authority, and as a result it is under some pressure to accept nominations: there is little ability to choose the most appropriate type of accommodation for each young person in this type of rural area.
- Over the first half of 2016, the scheme has suffered from a minority of more chaotic and vulnerable occupants, a couple of whom had been recently discharged from prison, returned to the hostel, and resumed problematic behaviour, setting back the progress of other residents. This had necessitated a number of evictions. These events had also affected staff morale, with staff feeling that they were making 'one step forward, two steps backwards', and a review with staff to re-energise the project was required. The scheme felt that it would have to be more cautious about admitting individuals in the future, but that this would have to be done in agreement with the other agencies.
- Welfare reform presented challenges, though the extent to which this would affect the project was still somewhat unclear at the time of the research. It was anticipated that most of the client group would be classified as vulnerable and that they would therefore be exempt from the forthcoming cuts to housing benefit.
- The housing association is merging with another, larger housing association and this offers both risks in merging and opportunities for new investment, such as the possibility of a purpose-built building for the project.

## The Rock Trust in Edinburgh

### Overview

The Rock Trust is an independent charity, established in 1991, that works with young people aged 16-25 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless across Edinburgh and the Lothians. The client group includes an equal mix of men and women, and most are over 18, unless they are care leavers. It includes young people who are in transition, leaving care or home, and those involved in offending and alcohol or drug misuse.

The Trust runs supported housing accommodating 37 young people in Edinburgh and 15 in West Lothian. It also operates a drop-in centre and provides floating support, supporting around 10-11 young people at any one time.

The Trust obtains funding from a wide range of sources, most of which is attached to funding specific posts or projects. The main sources in 2013-14 were Supporting People grants, other grants, and rental income (mostly paid by housing benefit). As a high-profile local organisation, the Trust also received a considerable sum (over 10 per cent of their annual income) from donations.

Original capital funding came from fundraising to purchase properties. The other properties that the Trust manages it does not own but instead leases from the council, or pays peppercorn rent to the charitable arm of a housebuilding company for them.

The Rock Trust operates several distinct projects:

- 1) Compass – Youth Work works with young people who have a history of being looked after, offending and/or homelessness. The project offers medium-term support around four key issues: moving on to a sustained tenancy; managing finances; entering employment, education or training, and becoming confident and able to interact positively with others by developing meaningful relationships. It provides a drop-in service, a week-day duty service for those in housing crisis, group work, mediation and mentoring – all of which are underpinned by focused one-to-one work with key workers. It has a café, a room for group work, a laundry, computers and showers. It is in the basement of the property where all the staff are based. The drop-in centre does not see large numbers at a time – around three to four per day would be typical. At the time of the fieldwork there was nobody in the day centre. Larger numbers have been known to attend the group sessions that are held there.

Lots of the young people using Compass are sofa-surfing – the Rock Trust perceive that the numbers doing this seem to be growing, even though rough sleeping has declined. They are particularly concerned about young women who are often staying in vulnerable situations as they are desperate to have somewhere to stay. Some are still with their parents but the relationship is breaking down and they're needing mediation or to check out future housing options. Compass will work to get them home if this is safe and possible. Some may be able to go home on a temporary basis and work towards a more planned move out in the future, which is considered preferable to ending up homeless or in a hostel. Some will have been already housed by the council into bed and breakfast accommodation but come down to use facilities.

- 2) Housing Support services provide accommodation with support and also floating support. In total they have 27 properties in Edinburgh, accommodating 31 young people. They also have 15 in West Lothian. Most of their housing is self-contained flats within tenement blocks but they also have two shared houses. The shared houses have one volunteer support worker who lives in one of the flats. The volunteer is paid a small amount of money, as well as free accommodation, and has to be in the house at least 20 hours per week. They help other housemates to get along with each other and liaise with the management team. All residents also have their own support worker who meets them regularly. And in addition there is a worker assigned to each of the shared houses who can help address house issues. The house worker comes to the house for a meal once a week. There is also management on call 24/7.

Most flat are single-occupancy but couples can be accommodated in the self-contained flats. They also have two two-bedroom flats, used mainly for single parents with babies. They used to put singles in them at times, but that became difficult with the bedroom tax, though the Scottish Government is now allocating sufficient discretionary housing payments that this is no longer an issue. They still prefer to keep them for single parents/couples with babies if possible though. Hostels will only house pregnant women who are less than six months pregnant, and will then refer them to Rock Trust or elsewhere.

- 3) Visiting support is for young people who already have their own tenancy. It may be focused on resettlement needs, or could focus on homelessness prevention for young people considered to be at risk of losing their accommodation. The scheme usually works with around 10–11 young people at any one time.
- 4) Nightstop provides emergency accommodation (one to three nights) in the homes of volunteers. Initially this scheme struggled because the local authority did not refer many people to it. This is because the Rock Trust needs to obtain references and to risk assess young people before it can accept them, and then phone around to find a host. This can often be done in a few hours, but if the local authority is under pressure to secure somewhere urgently for the young people they prefer to go to a hostel or bed and breakfast, which can take them straight away if they have space. A change in working practice to locate Rock Trust workers within housing offices, however, was improving the number of referrals by 2016.
- 5) Scottish Social Networks – The Rock Trust receive funding from the Scottish Government to work with local authorities throughout Scotland to improve the way they work on young people’s relationships. The aim is to ensure that young people maintain and develop the relationships they need so that they are not reliant on professional support in the long term. This may include mediation, befriending and role model work, or housing them near to existing support networks, with a focus specifically on working with adolescents.
- 6) Service User Involvement Group – The Rock Trust’s young people involvement work has had many guises over the years and tends to vary according to who is in the project at any one time – turnover is quite fast. They aim to give young people a voice, not just within the Rock Trust’s activities but also in the context of other agencies that affect them.

### **Key successes**

- The Rock Trust has a high profile locally and is known to other agencies and young people themselves. There are strong links between its different services. Close working with social services enabled Rock Trust staff to start to engage teenagers in care to prepare them for leaving.
- A new scheme of co-location of staff within local authority offices was proving successful at ensuring 16 and 17 year olds referred to the Rock Trust successfully enrolled for help. Simply signposting them had proved less reliable. IT systems that can cope with remote working were supporting this development.
- The range of supported housing offered means that there are very few young people deemed unsuitable and the referral agencies report that the large majority of referrals are accepted.
- Referral agencies particularly valued the shared flat as they felt this – with the supportive flat mates – was a type of accommodation in short supply in Edinburgh and worked well for young people not yet ready to live alone.

- Clients generally liked their support workers and valued the more informal responsive relationship that they had with them.
- The drop-in centre works well in a city like Edinburgh with a large population in a small area. Referral agencies often referred people to it and valued the broad nature of the client group (as opposed to facilities specifically for care leavers) as it helped young people to mix with a wider range of others.
- Young people often appreciate having someone available via the drop-in centre when they want the support, rather than pre-arranged appointments:
 

*“It’s really good to know that the duty is there. To be honest if I had a support worker then there’d be appointments and that would be something I could be late for, and that’s a problem. I don’t like being late... Everyone I’ve met here has been really nice and friendly and welcoming, so I trust that whoever I see will be nice.”* (Client)
- Shared housing with supportive flatmates provides a good halfway house for very young care leavers who appreciate the company and having someone around to prevent unwanted visitors. Five of the six shared housing residents interviewed had a positive preference for sharing and the sixth did not mind:
 

*“I’ve always lived in shared.”*

*“I’ve lived in hostels. I couldn’t care whether I shared or not.”*

*“I wasn’t ready to live on my own yet.”*

*“I don’t think I could have coped with living alone at the time.”*
- The role of the supportive flatmates appeared to work well, with workers feeling they had the backup of paid staff when needed.
- Others had a strong preference for self-contained housing, especially if past experiences had led them to be wary of other people.
- Young people were particularly appreciative of the help from key workers in applying for bursaries and benefits to support themselves whilst studying.
- Young people, especially those who were not in work, appreciated the courses on offer. They were able to articulate benefits to their mental health and wellbeing even from those courses that were not obviously vocational in nature.
- Young people valued that the Rock Trust continued to work with people even after they made mistakes, which they felt was important for an organisation working with teenagers.
- Young people really liked the free food, and felt that was a good reason to come to the centre:
 

*“I think the free food is awesome! ... it’s a really strong thing to have people be social over.”* (Client)

## Challenges

- The Rock Trust owns some properties, but also makes use of properties leased from the council and a benevolent housebuilding company at very low rents. This makes it hard to replicate the services in a cost-effective manner without either capital or ongoing subsidy.
- The Rock Trust is not able to meet demands for its housing services and waiting lists are reported by other agencies to often be long.
- Systems to coordinate all referrals via the council had resulted in a drop in referrals, and a move back to accepting self-referrals while the reasons behind the drop were investigated.
- Most young people are reliant on housing benefit in the supported housing and when they move out. Rents can be high. Those in work struggle to afford the rent – the Rock Trust has a slush fund to help them, but those interviewed did not seem aware of this facility. The Rock Trust is aware that getting them into work is “a hard sell” because they’re not any better off working, and the client interviews reflected this issue. The forthcoming changes to housing benefit for social tenants (capping it at LHA levels) may pose difficulties for young people who expect to move to a self-contained one-bedroom flat, as well as for those in supported housing whose rents exceed LHA levels.
- Young people find it hard moving to self-contained housing from a hostel as they lack friends, except those still at the hostel. Hostel residents turning up in a large group to use the house for a party can be difficult for the “host” of the party, whose tenancy may then be at risk if this happens frequently. This was something the staff were aware of and trying to tackle by working on clients’ self esteem and ability to say no to people.
- Attendance at the drop-in centre and the courses that are run there is very variable and hard to predict, meaning the facilities sit unused for much of the time. Staff are based within offices in the same building, which does mean they are able to get on with other tasks and are not wasting time staffing the drop-in centre.
- Referral agencies mentioned that some of their clients were reluctant to attend any sort of group. They had tended to signpost people to the day centre and were not often aware whether they had actually attended.
- Sanctions imposed by the DWP for those on benefits were a big issue for many clients, taking up considerable staff time giving out food packages, often in cases where the sanction was subsequently overturned.
- Young people are frustrated by lack of broadband or wifi in the shared housing:
  - “It’s getting so cheap these days. I mean no one doesn’t have wifi. Everywhere you go everyone has wifi. It’s so embarrassing!”*
  - “They want us to look for jobs, but how can we look for jobs when EVERYTHING is online. I mean, hardly anywhere shows that they’re looking for jobs on their shop windows these days. It’s all online, it’s all on websites.”*

The supportive housemates felt that the lack of internet access was hindering the tenants developing their skills with computers, as they were not getting the practice at home.

- Young people rely on their support workers to report repairs needed on their flats. The council then phone to arrange a time, but the young clients often fail to be in for the arranged time – chaotic, unplanned lifestyles and no diaries make it hard to keep appointments.
- Some young people interviewed were unclear about whether their current home was permanent or time-limited.
- Most clients were unclear on how much their rent was, and some knew only that it was being paid by “someone” but were unsure which agency this was. One tenant, about to start a job, believed that her housing benefit payments would be unaffected because the job was on a zero-hours contract. This confusion may make it hard for clients to understand how working or moving somewhere cheaper could improve their finances, and places them at risk of being unable to identify and sort out any problems with their benefits.
- A focus on helping clients into work and training has started to develop over recent years but this is still less strong than at other similar youth housing projects. Very few residents were in or looking for full-time work.
- It was suggested that the clause in tenancies preventing running a business from the premises could be hindering some residents in efforts to develop skills and establish businesses with activities such as selling artwork online.
- It was felt by some that being the one agency that young people turn to for support can at times hinder young people’s ability to integrate into their local community and to mix with people in different circumstances, including older people.

## Denbigh Youth Hub in Wales

### Overview

Denbigh Youth Hub includes a small housing project, consisting of six self-contained flats for 16-25 year olds, which is physically part of a larger building providing a range of youth and community services, the Youth Hub, in Denbigh. The scheme was initiated by a housing association group, Grwp Cynefin, and is operated by a subsidiary, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, and opened in mid 2014.

The housing project, Yr Hafod, has two staff on duty during the day, and sleeping cover at night (this also provides an evening caretaking service to the hub). Yr Hafod has daytime access to the facilities and activities of the hub, but also has its own independent access from the street. The flats are designed so that they are capable of being let as general-needs housing should the financial arrangements for the project change. The flats are let on license, to enable prompt

action to be taken should it become necessary to evict a resident. Yr Hafod is financed primarily from Housing Benefit and Supporting People grants, while the hub is financed primarily from letting income, mainly from Coleg Llandrillo which occupies the first floor of the building, plus a wide range of other funding and support from the County Council and the Denbigh Youth Project.

In addition to the six flats, Yr Hafod also includes communal areas, accommodation and offices for support staff. It is a short-term support scheme which aims to equip young people with the skills necessary for independent living, while at the same time supporting them to engage in a variety of education, social and training opportunities that will prepare them for future employment.

*“This scheme helps young people gain the skills they need to live independently when they move on from here, so that’s the point of it. These skills include working, cooking, managing a tenancy and sharing with each other, and budgeting. This is very high-standard accommodation. If young people get the support they need it makes a big difference.” (Referral agency)*

The County Council has a limited range of resources for accommodating young people. In addition to Yr Hafod, it operates a 33-place unit in Rhyl, Dyfydol, which provides 17 places with high support, then a step down to an assured shorthold tenancy with support, then a move to independent living. The Supporting People team commented that “if the six flats at Hafod are the Rolls Royce, then Dyfydol is the Fiat Panda”. They also have access to non-supported lodgings, “more like teenage fostering”; a joint scheme with Flintshire to place higher-risk, more chaotic young people with individual householders, on a bed and breakfast basis; and six units of supported housing through partner agency, NACRO. The key issues for the county identified by the Supporting People team were the need for smaller, higher-intensity provision for 16-17 year olds, and the cost of renting supported housing, because the cost of support meant that young people were unable to take minimum wage jobs as they were then unable to afford the necessary support.

### **Key successes**

- The building (RIBA Award winning) provides an open, welcoming environment for young people to drop in and engage with activities (even when closed in the evening, youths were congregating on the sheltered terrace by the entrance).
- The staff from the different projects all appeared to work easily and closely together, and the support available was appreciated by the young people who were using it.
- The projects provide support for young people from a very basic level (such as literacy, very small steps in confidence building and classes to prepare people for college).
- Yr Hafod had recently been reviewed by the Supporting People commissioners, and the grant had been renewed to 2018.
- A floating support scheme had been developed to offer support to young people when they move out of the project – this had been identified as a need, given the abrupt transition from full support to independent living.

- Yr Hafod has started a time banking system, paying £2.50 per hour up to a maximum of £30 per month, in return for activities such as cleaning the hostel or doing voluntary work. The money is not paid to the individual (to avoid benefit problems), but they can draw on their 'fund' to pay for things such as a driving licence or buying course books. One young person used it to join a local drama group. This approach is seen as having the advantage of dealing with a reluctance to “work for free”, and also introduces young people from families with a history of worklessness to the gains to be made from paid work, including the sense of having achieved something.
- Over the two years of operation, two young people had moved into social housing (one with floating support and the other in sustainable employment), one had moved into self-contained private rented housing, and eight had moved to shared housing or to their extended family (two of these had moved back home with their parents, reflecting improved family relationships).

### **Challenges**

- There have been difficulties with particularly chaotic individuals, and two had been asked to leave the project, both as a result of severe substance abuse – one refusing to engage with the Mental Health Team and whose mental health then deteriorated, the other after receiving a six-month custodial sentence. As a result of these cases, staff are much more aware of the need to consider the internal group dynamics of the residents. Too many young people with the same problems were felt to result in “managing chaos”. Although Denbighshire operates a ‘pathway’ approach, Yr Hafod has had to refuse some nominations of potentially disruptive clients.
- At its inception, Yr Hafod had a catchment area limited to Denbigh and its immediate surroundings, but it had been necessary to widen the catchment to include the south of the county, in order to avoid vacancy rates rising above 10% (at which point, Supporting People funding is clawed back).
- Welfare reforms posed potential risks, although the future definitions of vulnerability were unclear. The housing association is exploring a project in Denbigh to promote shared accommodation, as a possible solution for single under-35s, but staff felt that shared accommodation is potentially very risky and would have a high management cost. There are particular problems with putting two or more people together who do not know each other – especially if they are also vulnerable.

### **What works in tackling poverty?**

The rest of this report explores what we can learn from looking across all these ten schemes, to see what they show us about what works when tackling poverty of young people, and some of the challenges faced.

## A known local brand and reputation

Whilst a few of the schemes were new, others had been running for several years if not decades, and all benefitted from the good reputation of the housing organisation or provider. The reputation of the organisations, and their visibility in their local areas, helped to build trust and good working relationships with referral agencies and potential clients. Many of the schemes were 'known' for their work with particular client groups, something that helped build trust both with referral agencies and with young people themselves:

*"It's been established for a long time and is very much a known brand. There's a lot of knowledge shared between young people coming through the care system so they talk."* (Referral agency, Rock Trust)

*"For us, they are a valuable resource, plugging a gap in the market because, as a provider, we can't provide it."* (Referral agency, SmartLets)

*"I've had dealings with them in the past; a few years ago they helped me get what's known as a SmartMoves certificate, it's a deposit guarantee certificate. So they helped me with that a few years ago and because I'd remembered how they'd helped me out with that, I just sort of went back to approach them after I'd been made homeless and gone to the [hostel]."* (Client, SmartLets).

The extent to which schemes were linked in to other agencies depended in part on their location – in larger cities there were more active agencies and accommodation providers – but also in part on their age. Older and better-known organisations were generally better linked in to multi-agency working.

In contrast, some of the newer schemes had to start from scratch at building up contacts. This applied also to cases where a housing organisation was branching into a new area of work, as in the cases of both the schemes offering traineeships and apprenticeships.

For many of the schemes, particularly those providing supported housing, the organisations coordinated with other services to provide the right support for each of their clients. In some cases, schemes coordinated services with linked organisations or within the same organisation, such as the Midlands social lettings agency and the local Citizens Advice Bureau, and the supported housing schemes that had close working relationships with the drop-in centres also run by the organisation. In both of the employment schemes there were ties with local colleges to provide the necessary educational training for these projects. Supported housing and pre-tenancy schemes also coordinated with social services, leaving care teams, health visitors and the probation service. Formal or informal coordination with other services, along with good working relationships, also ensured that clients were referred on for support that they needed:

*"I was in a serious bad crisis where I had Enforcement Officers coming to my door (to my mum's house). And New Roots got in touch with [a charity], that help people in debt so it's New Roots who've helped me get out of debt, which is really, really good."* (Client, New Roots)

Developing good links with local organisations was a particular challenge for the tenancy training courses, as to run efficiently they needed a substantial number of new referrals each

month. Both schemes had struggled with engaging young people and getting them to turn up to the first session. Strong local branding and links to likely sources of referrals (such as social services and local hostels) were essential for recruiting participants. Young people were not necessarily keen to attend groups or interested in attending the training initially. These schemes had to cope with fluctuating attendance to provide courses in a sustainable manner (trying to avoid high resource levels per client). Schemes employed various strategies to manage attendance fluctuations, including not running courses at unpopular times, overbooking courses, running courses for staff from referral agencies, running courses at the same location as a drop-in so staff could use their time efficiently if no one attended, and making courses 'compulsory' for those seeking social housing. One of the pre-tenancy training courses had made the course 'compulsory' for young people wanting to move from supported into independent accommodation (and the other pre-tenancy course was trying to do the same). The course cannot be compulsory in the strictest sense as the local councils still had a duty to rehouse young people who met the criteria, but non-attendance could slow this process.

Building strong local networks was a particular challenge for schemes with short-term funding, as it took time to become known locally. Housing providers with a strong local presence were well-placed in this respect to run services as they already had many of the relationships required.

### **Supporting independence**

For housing schemes there was a fine balance between providing young people with a sense of independence and providing support where needed. Interviews and focus groups with young people suggested that this compromise could be difficult to achieve, with conflicting views (sometimes from the same person) about this. Overall a flexible 'on demand' approach to support was preferred by most, with a fixed programme of formal visits being seen as inconvenient, unnecessary or overwhelming.

Young people themselves had conflicting views around support, preferring flexibility for themselves but routine for their housemates and wanting informal support but wanting this to be available 24 hours per day. Negotiating the balance of support and independence was sometimes a difficult task for providers, with flexibility and individual tailoring key in achieving this.

### **Supporting through changing circumstances**

Changing domestic circumstances was a feature of many of the young people's lives – several had formed new relationships, had babies or split from partners during the time they were involved with one of the schemes. Some housing schemes, notably New Roots, offered flexibility to allow for the changing circumstances of their tenants – for example, including new or existing partners and children. This approach was highly valued by the tenants and their partners:

*“They’ve [New Roots] kept me out of trouble, they’ve stopped me from getting in trouble, from day one... they’ve given me stuff to do. They give you activities like this [craft session], they give you support. I like living here, I really do like living here.”* (Partner of client, New Roots).

Not all schemes could offer this flexibility, notably for those offering shared housing, due to the impact of partners on others of guests who felt it was unfair to expect tenants to share with extra unknown people and the impact this may have on utility bills); this presented difficulties for these tenants when personal circumstances changed and they wanted to live with a partner but were in accommodation that did not allow this.

### **Making shared housing work**

Shared housing can offer lower rent for young people, thereby reducing poverty. It was also clear from both staff and residents that for some young people it could be a very positive experience, especially for those who were very young. Staff reported that young people moving on from hostels or the care system were often daunted by living alone, and to combat loneliness often allowed large numbers of friends and associates (often from the hostel they had just left) to come to their house for parties, which could easily get out of hand and pose a risk to the tenancy. Tenants in shared housing noted benefits to their mental health and wellbeing through living in shared, rather than self-contained, housing:

*“I’ve just turned 17 this week. To me, getting a single flat, when I’ve never lived on my own before is quite scary... I don’t think I could have coped with living alone at the time.”* (Client, Rock Trust)

All of the schemes explored here offered some degree of support to young people in shared housing in managing the challenges of living with others:

*“The house manager comes round on a Wednesday morning, we have a house meeting on a Wednesday morning, so if there’s any sort of problem – any repair issues, or anything like that, or somebody not pulling their weight with keeping the kitchen or bathroom tidy or whatever – it can just be cleared up right then and there, it makes things a lot easier.”* (Client, SmartLets)

Particular challenges were reported by one of the London schemes in respect to gang culture, requiring a careful approach to placing people into shared housing:

*“They are hesitant about who the other young people will be – issues with gangs, bullying. It works particularly well here – Lewisham young people mixing with those from Wandsworth, so there’s less friction. A lot of young people in the care system know each other but it’s better when they’re from different areas. We do have a big gang problem. Young people are anxious about living with others who may be gang involved.”* (Referral agency, peer landlord)

## A new style of learning

One of the strongest themes from the tenancy training courses was that they were “not like school”. It was clear that many of the disadvantaged young people attending these schemes had had very negative experiences of school, including bullying, not understanding lessons and long-term truanting. Tenancy training courses needed to overcome these initial anxieties by creating a space that didn’t look or feel like a classroom. The general consensus in these approaches seemed to be to create a learning environment that is informal, relaxed and fun; notably, not like a classroom or reminiscent of school.

*“They like the trainers. It’s interactive. They end up thoroughly enjoying it. We had some notorious young people who we’d never have thought they could get to go and they’ve done the whole week and enjoyed it. They make it fun.”* (Referral agency, The Money House)

*“They learn so much but in a fun environment, it’s not like a classroom setting. We’ve looked at other services and seeing whether we can replicate some of the things that they’re doing – in a one-off setting. It’s such a model of good practice.”* (Referral agency, The Money House)

*“They communicate so I could understand it, interactive and make sure you’ve understood it.”* (Client, The Money House)

*“The people are good. You learn and you get to eat there. It’s comfy. But it’s fun. Even though you need to learn you enjoy it.”* (Client, The Money House)

Similar issues were experienced by the employability schemes; their clients had generally not enjoyed school and were quite nervous of the requirement to study English and maths, but enthusiastic about a different style of learning, more tailored to their needs:

*Interviewer: Have you had any support for your dyslexia here?*

*Client (Traineeship): Yes, I’ve had a couple of one-to-one sessions. And there’s been times when it’s been the whole group, and at one point I just broke down in tears because I was getting all the help and support I needed and I hadn’t got it at school.*

## Challenges

The emerging findings suggest that there were some challenges shared across the schemes.

### High rents

Providing housing that was affordable to young people on low incomes was a difficult challenge for most of the housing schemes, and one that many failed to achieve.

There are two key reasons for high rents: market conditions and the costs of providing support.

The cost of private rented housing is high in the UK, meaning that high rents are a key factor in contributing to the poverty of young people. Most young people are unable independently to

support themselves financially. Most housing schemes were therefore reliant on young people being able to claim housing benefit to pay the rent. In some cases this involved eligibility for increased rates of housing benefit permissible for certain groups of young people exempted from the shared accommodation rate (such as those moving on from hostels and care leavers aged under 22). For example, rents for New Roots were around £180 per week for self-contained accommodation, and nearly all clients were dependent on housing benefit to pay these rents. Young people on these types of schemes were effectively trapped in what is often termed the 'benefit trap', where working would be unlikely to make them any better off as housing benefit is (after a small allowance) reduced pound for pound if they earn. Irregular earnings could cause further difficulties with benefit claims stopping and starting and gaps between payments, leading to the perception that "it's risky to work" (Client, New Roots).

### **Supporting independence?**

The young people in the schemes studied were not, for the most part, in need of long-term support, and were expected to move on to independent living after a period of around six months to two years. Several schemes struggled with the challenge of providing the support clients needed while also providing an incentive to move on and a sense of progressing in their housing or working lives.

Some of the housing schemes had some low-cost housing available – which they were able to let to young people at rents similar to those found in social housing. This made it easier for their tenants to find work and still be able to afford their rent, reducing the problems associated with the benefit trap discussed above.

These schemes were, however, reliant on a supply of substantially sub-market housing leased to them from charities or in one case a benevolent housebuilding company. The supply of such housing was finite, making it hard to scale the activities or replicate them in circumstances where such housing was not available. The other challenge such schemes faced was that it was hard to encourage clients to move out of the accommodation, especially in areas such as London where market rents were very much higher. Tenants of the Peer Landlord scheme, for instance, paid around £100 per week for shared housing in London and vacancies in this scheme occurred very infrequently.

There were also some housing schemes that offered self-contained housing to young people, who were often then reluctant to move on to shared housing when they left the scheme. This is likely to be a growing issue as previously many had been able to move to self-contained housing in the social rented sector and still claim full housing benefit, whereas in the future they would be limited to claiming the costs of shared housing. At the time of the research the schemes were yet to find a solution to this issue. Young people generally felt that shared housing was an acceptable option for a period of time, but that they would like eventually to have a place of their own – which is in direct contrast to the situation many were in, of being expected to move on from self-contained housing into shared housing.

A similar issue occurred with one of the employment schemes that paid its apprentices more than could be expected in the local job market (and openly stated this in the job advertisement

and promotional materials). This had a positive short-term impact on clients' finances, as they were able to afford a better quality of life and to help their families out, and had a strong sense of achievement by earning money:

*“By getting paid, I can go out and get new stuff with my own money and not ask my mum all the time.”* (Client, Apprenticeship)

*“He prioritises paying his rent to his family and does this as soon as he is paid – “I don’t like the thought of her not being able to cope without that money, so I’ve got to give her the money as soon as possible.”* (Client, Apprenticeship)

In the long term, however, this system created similar difficulties to the low-rent housing; whilst this benefits the apprentices for the duration of their employment with the housing provider, they may not receive the same rate of pay once the scheme ends. The premise of the scheme was to prepare young people to continue an apprenticeship with their chosen placement (rather than a job without training), so the housing provider's generous payment during their apprenticeship may cause difficulties for apprentices transitioning to another apprenticeship with potentially lower pay. The long-term outcome of this could not be assessed during the timeframe of this research, but at the end of the apprenticeship seven apprentices (out of the 11 who completed the course) had secured employment, with only two being apprenticeships. Of those who secured employment, five were kept on by Regenda for an extension of the scheme and two were kept on by their work placement company to continue an apprenticeship with them.

There were also issues raised over the extent to which the schemes helped young people to integrate with wider services or whether they became reliant on the scheme's own staff for meeting all their needs. Several of the housing schemes leased properties from private or social landlords, who remained responsible for maintenance. The young tenants reported any issues to their key workers who then relayed messages to the landlords. Whilst the scheme's role as an intermediary potentially increases the waiting time for a response from the landlord, it also protected the tenant from having to liaise with a reluctant landlord (something which they may have to do after moving on). Furthermore, support staff felt that some of their tenants lacked the communication skills and reliability to liaise well with private landlords and contractors – for instance by failing to be in at agreed times for contractors to undertake maintenance. This is a difficult issue to tackle, because in recruiting private landlords to the scheme, the fact that the scheme undertook the management of communication with tenants was a positive point for prospective landlords. A related concern with the supported housing schemes was the high level of, and reliance on, the agency's own support services, potentially limiting the integration of young people with wider society, especially for tenants who were less in need of intensive support:

*“The one thing I always noted myself when I worked there was that if you only have your young person only socialising with other people in the same circumstances, it can stop them getting out of their circumstances. ...It’s not healthy for an organisation to provide everything, the young person becomes reliant on them for everything including their social networks, so harder to move on. You always need to work on the exit strategy – you need to have a strategy for what they’ll do when they move away.”* (Referral agency, Rock Trust)

*“We occasionally refer to the drop-in centre. We have our own drop in centre too, but sometimes young people don’t want to mix only with other care leavers, they prefer a broader section of society. Some attend both.”* (Referral agency, Rock Trust)

The lead tenant model used by the Peer Landlord scheme and the Rock Trust’s shared housing model aimed to provide an alternative approach, highlighting the *supportive* rather than *supported* focus and the ways in which tenants in shared housing were often mutually supportive.

There were also some failures to keep up with modern expectations in terms of internet access, again limiting young people’s ability to link into wider services and become independent of the scheme’s support. None of the shared accommodation, across all schemes, had internet access provided directly for tenants (one block in one scheme had incidental access as the building also contained staff offices). Whilst a group of tenants in one scheme had collectively bought a broadband package, a tenant group in another scheme were unsure whether this was allowed. The lack of internet access at home led to difficulties accessing government services (as the default mode is online), job searching and bidding on social housing properties for moving on. This was a source of some frustration to tenants:

*“It’s getting so cheap these days. I mean no one doesn’t have WiFi. Everywhere you go everyone has WiFi. It’s so embarrassing.”* (Client, Rock Trust)

*“They want us to look for jobs, but how can we look for jobs when EVERYTHING is online. I mean, hardly anywhere shows that they’re looking for jobs on their shop windows these days. It’s all online, it’s all on websites.”* (Client, Rock Trust)

*“As it is, if I need to look anything up on the internet, I have to go down the local library, which for me working full-time and finishing at half past eight at night, I don’t want to be going down to the library I want to come straight home.”* (Client, SmartLets)

## Conclusions

The projects explored here represent varied approaches to the ways in which housing providers can tackle the poverty of young people. The three key strategies – **reducing rents, increasing earnings, and improving budgeting and life skills** – all have the potential to reduce poverty. A key feature of all these schemes is that they are short term – they aim to support young people through a period of transition into independent living. One key aim of the study was to examine the sustainability of the different approaches. In financial terms, none of these were cheap. Most worked with small numbers of young people and had high costs per client, though many of the clients were very vulnerable young people – such as care leavers and those who have left school with no qualifications – who are likely to need substantial support and investment to become self-sufficient.

The strategies of **increasing earnings and improving budgeting skills** are critical to equip young people to avoid future poverty, as these are skills young people can take with them after

they leave; simply offering housing with rents eligible for housing benefit is less useful as a short-term project because young people are likely to take several years before they are financially self-supporting and able to afford market rents, or even social rents. **Low-rent housing** does however help, not just for the duration of the client's stay in the project but also longer term, because the low rents make it financially advantageous to find paid work, which itself increases young people's skills, employability and likely future earnings.

The research aimed to explore whether the schemes could be transferred to other areas within the UK. Currently, schemes such as those examined in this research are locally based and there are **no simple mechanisms in place for replicating schemes elsewhere**. Many had been initiated by passionate individuals within housing organisations, with a dedication to their local area. The success of the schemes was dependent on the local services and networks of which they were a part, and the availability of funding. Similar services would likely need to exist in the new area for the transfer to be successful, or alternatives (such as providing those services within the organisation) would need to be negotiated. Furthermore, the success of some schemes was linked to the local housing market (such as the local market rent, or the cultural expectation of sharing); transferred schemes may find it easier in areas where the local housing market is similar.

A third key question for the research was the specific role that housing providers have to play in addressing poverty. It is widely acknowledged that this is a question which has been under-prioritised by social landlords, who have focused instead on housing provision and relying on housing benefit to mitigate against extreme poverty (Clarke et al, 2015) – an approach that many are now rethinking in the light of welfare reforms and cuts to benefits. All of the schemes explored here were run by housing organisations, and most had **initiated the work** themselves. However the role of housing itself within their activities varied. Whilst providing supported housing is clearly a familiar task to housing providers, running apprenticeships and tenancy training courses is not a key activity for most, and these activities can and are provided by other organisations in other areas. The research explored what housing providers were particularly able to bring to this kind of work. One factor was their strong local presence and links with other agencies – as discussed above, having **strong links to referral agencies** and other sources of support for clients is key to the success of many of the schemes – though housing providers were less strong at linking into services less closely related to housing, such as education providers, and experienced some difficulties with joined up working in this area, for example over the timing of courses and apprenticeships. A related factor was housing providers' local presence and reputation among their tenants, including those likely to become their clients. It was clear that several of the schemes were run by organisations that were a known brand locally, and this helped in developing trust with clients. The clients for apprenticeships, traineeships and tenancy training courses were not, however, largely drawn from their own tenant base, suggesting that this role is not critical for the schemes studied.

For the schemes where housing provision was central, the focus was primarily on equipping tenants with life skills to manage more independently in the future. The focus on finding work was not strong in all schemes, though it is in the nature of working with this age group that prioritising education and training opportunities above getting into paid work immediately may

be more important to securing higher earnings in the future. Rent levels were important in determining tenants' interest in finding work, with low rents clearly providing an incentive to look for work and maintain a job. In much of the country low rents entail a high level of subsidy (either in cash, or in the form of property being let at sub-market rents), unless the actual market costs of accommodation can be brought down. Shared housing clearly has a key role to play here for this age group, as it has the potential to bring the actual costs down. Some young people from vulnerable backgrounds may struggle to live in shared housing initially and need support to help them, though equipping them with the skills needed to live alongside housemates may be a key way to help them find genuinely affordable housing in the future and thereby reduce poverty.

The schemes included as part of this research demonstrate the broad range of activities undertaken by social landlords to address poverty, although this was not the explicit aim of the schemes. Taking into account the successes, challenges and discussion of these schemes, some broad principles for what works in addressing poverty amongst young people can be identified. Schemes worked well when they were administered by **known and trusted organisations** (in relation to young people and project partners), with these organisations working as part of a network of relevant, local service provision. Schemes that worked well provided support that was **flexible to individual need** and appropriately tailored to different stages of the process, balancing the need for support with the risk of 'over-supporting'. As part of this, success was found where schemes fostered independence amongst young people, including developing **realistic expectations of their life after the scheme**.

Some of the schemes examined for this research went well beyond what can be considered core to the role of housing providers, and could be considered as an "optional extra", where funding can be found, a **challenge at times of reduced funding**. Finding ways to make schemes cost-effective and sustainable remains a key challenge – both in terms of long-term funding for schemes and equipping young people with the skills needed to avoid poverty in the future.

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