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

A review of the literature

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Defining poverty in the UK and worldwide

This literature review focuses on projects carried out by housing organisations aimed at helping young people in poverty. While initially this might seem like a clearly defined group of activities, there are some definitional issues. Poverty is a concept without a widely agreed precise definition, even within the UK (Seymour, 2009).

The official measure of poverty in the UK is a relative one, set at 60% of the national median income; this measure is also endorsed by the EU and OECD, although they describe it as a measure of vulnerability to poverty rather than poverty itself (ACOSS, 2014). However, it has been criticised as arbitrary and not reflecting the real situation of households, especially once housing costs are taken into account (France, 2008). Other attempts at producing a poverty threshold in the UK have been carried out, for example the work of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to establish a Minimum Income Standard for the UK, although this does not explicitly specify that households falling below the standard should be classified as being in poverty (Davis, et al., 2014).

In contrast, in the USA and Canada, the official measures of poverty are absolute, based upon a multiple of essential spending, adjusted for inflation (Johnson & Smeeding, 2012; Cotton, et al., 1999). The US measure, based exclusively on food costs, has been widely criticised for failing to reflect changes in housing and other essential costs, and many attempts have been made to agree on an updated measure, but without success (Fisher, 1992). A measure which is widely used by official bodies in the USA is the Supplemental Poverty Measure, which is a theoretical measure of absolute poverty, but which, like the Canadian LICO (Low Income Cut Off), also takes account of changes in the costs of clothing, shelter and utilities (Johnson & Smeeding, 2012).

The measure officially used in Australia, the Henderson poverty line, is a relative measure but lower than that used in the UK, based on an inflation adjustment of the 1970 minimum wage (Johnson, 1987); some independent Australian studies instead choose to use higher relative poverty lines, such as the OECD/UK definition (ACOSS, 2014).

It is clear that is no true consensus on a neutral measure of poverty, either internationally or within the UK; some also suggest that a poverty measure should consider issues other than the financial situation of the household (France, 2008; ACOSS, 2014). The resulting complexity of the measures which can be used means poverty may be difficult to measure by some definitions without extensive data gathering, at least requiring detailed financial and demographic information about the individual or household; as will be seen this poses challenges when considering the effectiveness of a scheme or programme intended to tackle poverty.

The importance of poverty

Despite this definitional difficulty, poverty remains a central issue; it has been argued that without addressing poverty, projects seeking to address social problems may be failing to address the root problem and may not succeed (Taylor, 1998; Parsell & Marston, 2012).

Link between housing and poverty

At its broadest, planning decisions have the potential to affect the access to resources for those in poverty and/or those in deprived communities; these decisions can influence the provision of public transport, access to places of employment, the quality and type of retail premises, developments of housing and retail space and the availability of public amenities and facilities (Ellis & Henderson, 2013)Whilst planning choices can affect social exclusion (either to reduce or exacerbate levels), social outcomes have been lost from planning decisions and debates over time, instead with a focus on more technical components (Ellis & Henderson, 2013). As such, housing and its related issues, has the capacity to alleviate or exacerbate the social exclusion already experienced by individuals (Somerville, 1998).

Poverty can also be associated with housing through the proportion of income spent on housing costs, which is much higher for poorer households: "In 2012/13 people in the bottom fifth of the income distribution spent on average 28 per cent of their income on housing, three times as much as the richest fifth, who spent 9 per cent. The middle fifth spent 16 per cent" (MacInnes et al., 2014: 20). The necessity of housing, and the costs associated with this, can contribute to poverty. There are rural/urban differences in the affordability of housing; private renting is more affordable than ownership in more rural areas (with the reverse true in urban areas) (Bramley & Watkins, 2009). Bramley and Watkins (2009) highlight that affordability issues in rural areas are driven by a shortage of housing. As such, there are different characteristics and interactions between poverty and affordability in rural and urban areas; housing in rural areas is less likely to be affordable than in urban areas, however rural residents are less likely to be in poverty, with a suspected net result of having pushed poor rural residents out towards more affordable urban areas (Bramley & Watkins, 2009).

Finding affordable housing can be complicated for people on Housing Benefit, who may be unsure about what level of rent they can afford due to uncertainties in what amount of Housing Benefit they would be eligible for; any shortfall between Housing Benefit and rent would need to be met by the individual (Kemp & Rugg, 2001). Shortfalls, in the case of this research which were caused by Housing Benefit changes, were commonly met by reducing non-housing expenditure; having a stable home was the most important consideration (Beatty et al., 2014).

Housing tenure has an important relationship with material deprivation; tenants are more likely to be in deprivation compared to homeowners (Berthoud & Bryan, 2004). However, the relationship between tenure and poverty is not straightforward; research by Burrows (2003) shows that half of those in poverty are homeowners, with just under a fifth being outright owners of their homes. The outcomes of poverty differed between renters and homeowners with renters being more likely to be in poor physical health, have unhealthy behaviours and

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be socially excluded than homeowners in poverty, whereas homeowners were more likely to have poor quality housing and worse mental health (Burrows, 2003).

The quality of housing available to residents above and below the poverty threshold differs; lower quality housing (such as problems with damp and leaks) is more common for households below the poverty threshold than above, across the European Union (Lekles & Zolyomi, 2009) (Lekles and Zólyomi, 2009). However, the standards of the physical characteristics of housing (such as having sufficient space and central heating) are not significantly different between households in poverty and those who are not (Lekles & Zolyomi, 2009).

Poverty and poor quality housing are associated with poor health, although this is an interrelated relationship with no proven causality (Monk, et al., 2010). One example that demonstrates these associations is 'excess winter deaths', where Britain has more deaths in the winter than the rest of the year (Monk, et al., 2010); these deaths could possibly be associated with existing health problems, having a cold home due to poor insulation or being unable to afford to heat a home.

The increasing involvement of housing organisations such as social landlords in projects aiming to address community well-being, often called the "Housing Plus" approach, has been noted for some years (Evans, 1998). It is now routine for housing organisations in the public sector to seek to address issues critical to poverty such as financial exclusion, debt or unemployment (see Fuller and Palmer, 2001). But, importantly for this research, few housing organisations in the UK consider reducing poverty to be an explicit goal (Clarke, et al., forthcoming). Therefore, it may not always be clear the extent to which success in addressing these issues also means success in addressing poverty; for example a programme which tackles welfare dependency successfully will only address poverty if as a result the households involved increase their income (Shlay & Holupka, 1992).

Projects may often:

- Reduce poverty as a by-product of the work, not the primary aim
- Not be evaluated in terms of their success in reducing poverty, but in other terms with varying relevance to poverty, such as number of people rehoused, or reduction in arrears owed to the landlord
- May have an unclear impact on poverty, for example reducing poverty among the organisation's tenants but potentially increasing it in the wider community

It is also important to distinguish between child poverty and youth poverty; the former has had much policy attention in the UK, but relatively few initiatives have focused specifically on youth poverty (France, 2008). In part because of this, projects which help young people may not always be exclusively aimed at young people. For example, projects aiming to help vulnerable single parents may not be explicitly restricted to young people, but nevertheless may cater almost exclusively to that group in practice.

UK: Projects
In the UK, subsidised social housing is provided by a combination of Local Authorities and independent non-profit Housing Associations, referred to collectively as social landlords.

Most social landlords with more than a few properties help their tenants in a variety of ways beyond the provision of housing. For example, they may provide money advice, tenancy support, employment advice or community facilities (Tunstall, et al., 2013). Some of these services are aimed specifically at young people, although few have an explicit aim of combating poverty (Clarke, et al., forthcoming).

Examples provided by Housing Associations, include supporting tenants into employment through providing work experience, CV writing advice, free courses and sessions on interview techniques (Community Housing Cymru Group, 2014). In addition, Housing Associations can help to reduce poverty amongst tenants by improving the energy efficiency of their homes and offering advice on other ways to reduce energy bills (Community Housing Cymru Group, 2014).

In addition, independent homelessness or housing charities which do not provide social housing also carry out initiatives to combat youth poverty; where these are housing-related they have been included in the scope of this research.

Social landlords also work in partnership with organisations of any type to deliver these additional services. For example, Moat Housing provide youth work and community-building projects on their Vineries estate in Medway via a local grassroots charity (Vineries Community Project, 2011) which also works with the Local Authority and other charitable organisations.

In addition, Crisis worked with other charities and Housing Associations to set up pilot schemes to encourage and facilitate sharing accommodation for people (aged under 35) in receipt of the Shared Accommodation Rate of the Local Housing Allowance (Battty, et al., 2015). These schemes supported people in sharing, which was deemed the most financially sensible option for them. Examples of the pilots included training flats, accommodation for single parents with non-resident children, facilitating matching lodgers with hosts (Battty, et al., 2015).

UK: Availability of evaluation literature

The literature publicly available which includes evaluations of projects aiming to help young people in poverty is sparse. It is not that innovative projects of this type do not exist; several studies have identified multiple innovative projects which reduce poverty among young people (Terry, 2011; Foyer Federation, 2011), but these rarely include an evaluation of impact, beyond stating the project's scale and intended goals. A search of the academic literature and housing organisation websites found only a small number of detailed evaluations had been published, some of which focused on individual projects and others on a range of projects.

Table 1.1 Existing UK Evaluations located by literature review

Author	Project type	Method	Evaluates process	User satisfaction	Impact on users
(Battty, et al., 2015)	Various – related to	Qual – staff / landlords / users	Partially	Y	Partially

	facilitating sharing				
(Coatham & Martinali, 2010)	Community regeneration	Qual – staff	Y	N	N
(Crane, et al., 2014)	Resettlement service	Qual /quant – users	Y	Y	Y
(Evans & McAteer, 2011)	Debt advice	Quant – staff / landlords	N	Y	N
(Foyer Federation, 2011)	Foyers	Qual – staff / users	Y	N	N
(Gardiner & Simmonds, 2012)	Employment advice	Metastudy	Y	N	Y
(Harding & Willett, 2008)	Hostel provision	Qual – staff / users	Y	Y	Partially
(Hennessy, et al., 2005)	Resettlement service	Qual – staff / users	Y	Y	N
(Moynihan, 2014)	Money advice	Qual – users	Y	Y	Y
(Pro Bono Economics, 2013)	Wide-ranging	Quant - economic	Y	N	Y
(Reid & Klee, 1999)	Homelessness services	Quant - users	Y	Y	N
(Sim & Brodie, 2000)	Resettlement service	Qual + quant – staff + users	Y	Y	N
(Somerville, et al., 2011)	Hostel provision	Qual - users	Y	Y	N
(Terry, 2011)	Wide-ranging	Qual - staff	Y	N	N
(Wade & Dixon, 2006)	Resettlement support	Quant – users / former users	N	Y	Y
(Vineries Community Project, 2011)	Youth work	Qual – staff, users	N	Y	N

Source: Search of academic and professional literature

Of those which were found, many focused on measuring the level of provision, satisfaction levels among current clients or tenants, perceptions of staff, or the administrative success of the scheme in providing the service. For example, one evaluation of a community regeneration scheme (Coatham & Martinali, 2010) focused almost exclusively on how service provision could be arranged and sustained, rather than the impact of that provision on service users. Another (Foyer Federation, 2011) focused on the experiences and opinions of project staff, and how far they took into account current Foyer Federation guidance, with some case studies of successful client experiences.

Many evaluations did contain assessments of the satisfaction levels of tenants or clients, for example an older assessment of an outreach project (Sim & Brodie, 2000), or a wide-ranging analysis of the provision of services to homeless young people in Manchester (Reid & Klee, 1999). These could be valuable in identifying shortcomings in provision; for example a study of a resettlement service on Merseyside identified important areas for improvement in how the service was provided (Hennessy, et al., 2005). However, none of these

systematically compared the situation of clients or tenants before and after the project, hampering the ability to see whether the project itself had an impact on poverty, as opposed to satisfied clients' expectations.

Most evaluations of individual projects published were also qualitative, for example one evaluation of a YMCA hostel spoke in great detail to a small number of young people about their lived experience of the hostel and how they felt it had affected their lives (Somerville, et al., 2011), while Hyde Housing assessed satisfaction and impact of a money advice service through eleven case studies of participants (Moynihan, 2014).

It is important to say that while government guidance places the emphasis on quantitative studies (H M Treasury, 2011), qualitative studies can also be rigorous and effective as evaluations (Karnilowicz, et al., 2014), and in the case of small projects, may be the only approach possible due to the small number of participants (Greenberg & Barnow, 2014). However, to achieve this level of effectiveness, they must follow a clearly explained, unbiased and systematic methodology, which is not the case with many of the qualitative evaluations carried out (Judd & Randolph, 2006). Even where qualitative studies are of high quality, the lack of quantitative data or a consistent methodology makes it difficult to extrapolate an impact on poverty, or to compare the effectiveness of different approaches.

Only one of the studies of young people found for this literature review (Crane, et al., 2014), an assessment of a resettlement service, considered the impact on clients with the level of financial detail which might be needed to consider the impact on any formal measure of poverty. One other study, of debt advice schemes aimed at a variety of age groups, considered the impact in financial terms, but in this case on landlords via arrears reductions rather than on tenants themselves (Evans & McAteer, 2011). Both of these studies were general evaluations of the outcomes of a *type* of project rather than an individual project evaluation.

Finally, sometimes organisations prefer to evaluate a group of projects together, drawing overall conclusions about the effectiveness of their work. This may be useful, for example, where individual clients or tenants participate in multiple projects, or where an organisation needs to demonstrate its effectiveness to stakeholders or the general public, but is less useful for identifying particularly successful types of intervention.

To summarise, while there are a limited number of evaluations available which do suggest positive social impacts, the extent of those impacts is unclear and in particular the impact specifically on poverty remains uncertain (Tunstall, et al., 2013).

North America: Projects and Literature

In the USA, municipalities are the biggest providers of subsidised housing, through local Housing Authorities or similar agencies. Although traditionally these authorities have focused simply on housing provision, since the 1980s there has been pressure on them to provide a range of related support services. These activities are primarily driven by a policy aim of making public housing and welfare a temporary support, with the help of which tenants will move back into the employment and private housing markets (Kleit, 2004; Shlay & Holupka, 1992).

As such, support provided is funded on the basis that it improves the earning power of tenants or helps them to move on from public housing (Kleit, 2004). Although this means that support is narrower in scope than in the UK where housing organisations have a broad social mission, evaluations of the support that is provided are more likely to measure financial impacts.

As found in the UK, the literature available is limited in both quality and quantity. The large scale of Housing Authorities and their projects does mean that quantitative evaluations are more feasible, but it remains the case that many programmes are not evaluated at all (Dworsky & Dion, 2014).

It remains unclear from the literature whether the relative paucity of literature in the USA and Canada compared to the UK reflects a lesser level of provision of services, or a lesser focus on evaluation.

Table 1.2 Existing North American Evaluations located by literature review

Author	Project type	Method	Evaluates process	User satisfaction	Impact on users
(Shlay & Holupka, 1992)	Employment advice	Quant - clients	Y	Y	Y
(Kleit, 2004)	Employment and housing advice	Quant - clients	Y	N	Y
(Kleit & Rohe, 2005)	Employment and housing advice	Quant - clients	Y	N	Y
(Bridgman, 2001)	Employment training	Qual – clients	Y	Y	N
(First Place for Youth, 2013)	Resettlement support	Quant, qual – clients, staff	Y	Y	Y

Source: Search of academic and professional literature

Australia: projects and literature

In Australia, social housing is provided mainly by municipalities. Until 2008, these were very strongly focused on the provision of housing to those in need of it, with services beyond this (including support for homeless people) being provided by other organisations. Since 2009, however, the provision of housing and other support services, particularly for homeless people, have been combined under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010).

As in the UK and North America, it has been noted that there is a paucity of publicly available literature evaluating projects in Australia, in particular with a quantitative dimension, and no single widely used evaluation technique (Judd & Randolph, 2006; Gronda, 2009). Very little publicly available literature on the evaluation of housing sector projects to reduce poverty was found, perhaps due to the recent nature of the widening of the role of housing providers in Australia. For example, Foyers are a recent development in Australia, and operate mainly on a small scale (Steen & Mackenzie, 2013).

One very detailed and comprehensive study with relevance to poverty was found, of a pilot project (titled "Journey to Social Inclusion", at the Sacred Heart Mission in St. Kilda) to support the resettlement of homeless people and their reintegration into normal life, carried out by the University of Melbourne and RMIT University (Johnson, et al., 2012).

Table 1.3 Existing Australian Evaluations located by literature review

Author	Project type	Method	Evaluates process	User satisfaction	Impact on users
(Johnson, et al., 2012)	Resettlement support	Quant – clients	Y	N	Y
(Grace, et al., 2011)	Foyer	Qual – clients	Y	Y	Y
(Randolph & Wood, 2005)	Foyer	Qual – clients	Y	N	Y

Reasons for the lack of availability of literature

It is important to emphasise that a lack of published literature does not necessarily mean evaluations are not taking place. Annual Reports of housing organisations frequently contain headline findings of monitoring or evaluation of programmes. This quote from Places for People's Annual Review 2012-13 is typical:

We also continued our work on two projects in Bristol: 'Looking Forward' and 'Opportunity Bristol', which help tenants enter employment, training or volunteering. We worked with 82 people, moving 35 into employment, 20 into further learning or training, and 10 into volunteering or work experience.

Places for People, Annual Review 2012-13

However, despite government guidance that publication of evaluations should be encouraged (H M Treasury, 2011), the publication of either data or evaluations underlying these statements is rare, and therefore little can be drawn from them in terms of comparing the effectiveness of different approaches. Even where a comprehensive evaluation is published, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding poverty if it is not regarded as a focus of the evaluation. For example, a review commissioned by Centrepoint of their activities showed considerable savings to the taxpayer, but did not seek to quantify the impact on client or tenant incomes or poverty (Pro Bono Economics, 2013).

A survey of housing organisations regarding the evaluation of their project suggested that many organisations did make some kind of assessment of impact, although some of the tools designed to assess social impact relied solely on project staff to judge whether the project caused positive outcomes for individual clients (Wilkes & Mullins, 2012). A separate survey of housing organisations providing schemes to support tenants or clients into employment suggested 63 per cent of providers had some kind of mechanism to measure impact or success (Gardiner & Simmonds, 2012), although the detail of that mechanism was not explored. It is therefore unclear how many of the mechanisms might consist of measures of number of people assisted, or client satisfaction levels, or a focus on outcomes such as finding employment without any consideration of causation.
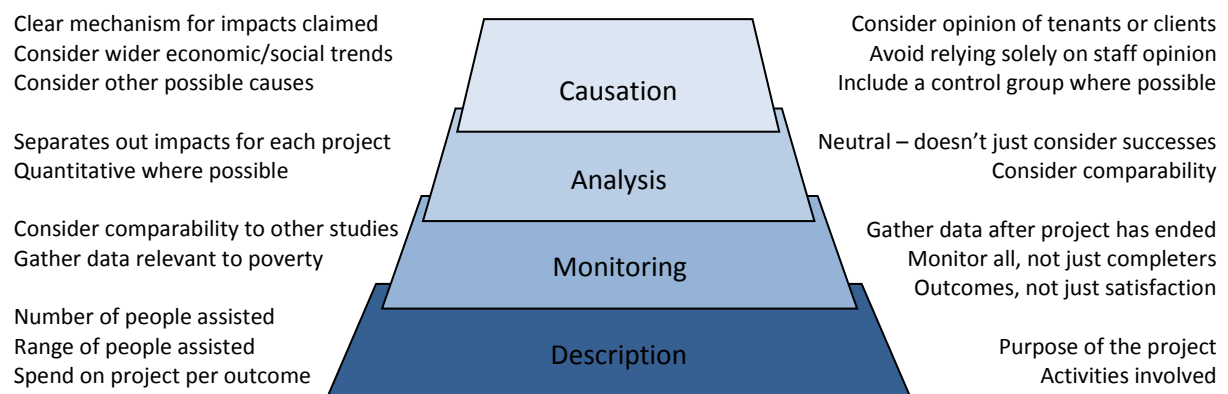
It is likely, therefore, that evaluations or at least evaluation data for projects do exist, but they may remain in-house unless there is a compelling reason to publish them. For this literature review, copies of evaluation documents for individual projects regarding young people were requested from multiple organisations; some felt that these documents were confidential.

The difficulty of carrying out evaluations is also an issue. Challenges outlined in the academic literature include:

- The difficulty of assessing long term impact. Some evaluations, due to data protection or time limitations, can only contact clients during the programme, or immediately after the end of it (Wade & Dixon, 2006).
- The difficulties involved in identifying any 'control group' to compare against, making it difficult to attribute causation to the project concerned. A reduction in poverty may have taken place with or without the provision (Mercier, et al., 1992; Dworsky & Dion, 2014).
- The impact of other projects, or changes in the political or economic context. For example, some apparent 'successes' in finding employment for clients may in fact be attributable to economic growth (Tunstall, et al., 2013), while some 'failures' of projects seeking to find housing for clients may be attributable to reducing social landlord emphasis on housing need, rather than an issue with the project itself (Harding & Willett, 2008).
- The complexity of measuring social impact; even with specialist software tools, the time and resources required can be a significant burden on the organisation (Wilkes & Mullins, 2012).

The key components of an effective evaluation of the impact of a project on poverty among young people are summarised in the chart below.

Chart 1: Key elements of an effective evaluation

Clear mechanism for impacts claimed
Consider wider economic/social trends
Consider other possible causes

Separates out impacts for each project
Quantitative where possible

Consider comparability to other studies
Gather data relevant to poverty

Number of people assisted
Range of people assisted
Spend on project per outcome

Causation

Analysis

Monitoring

Description

Consider opinion of tenants or clients
Avoid relying solely on staff opinion
Include a control group where possible

Neutral – doesn't just consider successes
Consider comparability

Gather data after project has ended
Monitor all, not just completers
Outcomes, not just satisfaction

Purpose of the project
Activities involved

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