The Positive Pathway Model:
A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the key findings from a rapid evaluation of the impact of the St Basils 'Positive Pathway' accommodation and support model for young people. The evaluation was commissioned by St Basils and conducted by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University. The funders of the model, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), requested a rapid evaluation to understand more about the model's impact within English local authorities. This report is the main output from this evaluation, and aims to provide St Basils, DCLG, and their partners with a better understanding of the impact and traction that the Positive Pathway Model is having within local authorities and the effectiveness of St Basils' efforts to promote it. Based on these findings, the report makes recommendations with a view to supporting further development and refinement of the model.

The following methods were used:

- an online survey of local authorities in England

- in-depth interviews with 15 local authorities

- site visits in two local authorities to interview a range of key stakeholders on their positive pathway.

Key Messages

This evaluation has evidenced four overarching findings:

1. The Positive Pathway Model is a robust framework that can be implemented in a wide range of different contexts - different local authority structures, different housing markets and different geographical areas.

2. Local authority officers had high regard for the work of St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory Service, highlighting their nationally recognised expertise, knowledge and understanding and ability to influence key decision makers and, in so doing, help local authorities forge better partnerships, particularly between Housing and Children's Social Care.

3. Where implemented, the Positive Pathway Model has a significant impact on local authority practice and provision, including their use of data and their understanding of the needs of younger people. Local authorities report that this had led to improved services, more effective use of scarce resources and better outcomes for younger people.

4. The financial constraints facing local authorities pose a risk to the sustainment of existing Positive Pathways, and may limit the ability of more local authorities to establish a positive pathway. However, the Model does offer local authorities the ability to identify the gaps in their provision and think creatively about how to improve their services for younger people by using resources more effectively.

The Impact of St Basils Youth Homelessness Advisory Service

- The Positive Pathway Model is well known amongst local authorities in England. The survey found that 90 per cent of local authorities had some knowledge of the model. However, knowledge was limited for a fifth of local authorities and 6 per cent reported no knowledge of the Model at all.

- The Positive Pathway Model has been used extensively in English local authorities (see Figure 2.3). While 7 per cent had used it extensively, 40 per cent of local authorities had made use of certain aspects of the model, suggesting that local authorities often adopt key aspects of the model. There was, therefore, significant latent demand for the Positive Pathway Model. Just over a third (36 per cent) of local authorities had so far not used the Model but were interested in doing so.

- Local authorities with knowledge of the Positive Pathway Model regarded it as a robust, developed and 'fit for purpose' tool, capable of improving pathways for younger people facing homelessness.

- St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory Service was providing valuable support and advice to local authorities - both in direct relation to implementation of the Positive Pathway Model and more general advice and support around issues associated with youth homelessness policies and practices. Advisors were particularly well regarded for having the following attributes:

  - highly skilled and knowledgeable about youth homelessness policy and practice in local authority settings

  - the ability to identify good practice from other areas and shape it to the needs of the local authority

  - having gravitas as nationally recognised mentors, which carried weight with senior staff and helped to forge partnerships (in particular between Housing and Children's Social Care).

- Awareness of the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service was high. Over 60 per cent of local authorities had benefited from the service. However a quarter of local authorities were aware of the service, but had not used it; and 13 per cent were not aware of it.

- The Youth Homelessness Advisory Service had made a significant impact on local authorities that had engaged with it. Nearly half (46 per cent) reported that the service had made a lot of difference and helped a lot to move forward with implementation of an enhanced pathway, and 37 per cent reported that it had made some difference that had resulted in changes being made.

- The Youth Homelessness Advisory Service was regarded by local authorities to be of high quality. Over half (54 per cent) of local authorities rated the service as 'excellent'; 39 per cent rated it 'very good'; and 7 per cent rated it 'good'. No respondents rated it negatively.

- Local authorities were generally satisfied with the amount of advice and support they received from the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service. At the current delivery level of two days free of charge, the majority of local authorities (62 per cent) reported this to be the right level of service, though a third would have preferred some more time. In many cases, Advisors offered advice and support above this amount, especially for follow-up questions and queries. In addition, the survey found that around half of local authorities would like additional support to implement the Positive Pathway Model.

Local Authority Implementation of the Positive Pathway Model

- Local authorities identified a range of challenges faced in relation to youth homelessness, including: an increase in the proportion of homeless younger people; poor access to

- emergency, supported and affordable housing; poor working relationships between housing authorities and children's social care; and ongoing reductions to service budgets.

- The Positive Pathway Model has led to significant improvements to strategic and collaborative approaches to youth homelessness. 80 per cent of local authorities reported that there had been some or major improvement in this aspect.

- In particular, the Positive Pathway Model and the support from St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory Service has been a catalyst for better collaborative working between housing authorities and children's social care.

- There was notable variation in the engagement of local authorities in different aspects of the Positive Pathway Model. More local authorities have been improving emergency and supported accommodation for homeless young people and commissioning housing related support for this group. Fewer local authorities are currently providing additional support for young people with multiple and complex needs, although there was considerable interest amongst several local authorities for innovative initiatives, such as Housing First.

    - While **information and advice** services exist in most local authorities, it was reported that these are poor at delivering services to younger people and families. The model had prompted some local authorities to reshape these services to focus specifically on youth homelessness, but resource constraints and poor access to schools were key limiting factors.

    - **Early help** has proved a difficult area to address within the Positive Pathway for some local authorities and there is often some confusion between its role at stage 2 and stage 3 of the Model. Over half of local authorities who had a pathway reported that early help services were directly impacting on youth homelessness prevention (Figure 3.5). Some local authorities were giving less attention to homelessness prevention via their early help services and, instead, focusing resources on help at the point of need - at the point where a young person presents as homeless. Aligning services towards earlier homelessness prevention was reported to be difficult to achieve in the current climate of austerity measures.

    - Local authorities with **integrated hubs** that combined advice, assessment, prevention and access to commissioned accommodation had a clear advantage in addressing youth homelessness. The Hub is, therefore, *the* core element of the Positive Pathway Model, and its implementation leads to the strongest impact on youth homelessness.

    - The Positive Pathway Model has had a direct influence on the supply of **commissioned emergency and supported accommodation** available to younger people facing homelessness. The model has enabled local authorities to improve their coordination of supported housing and allowed commissioners to respond better to demand from younger people. However, some local authorities were struggling to provide a range of supported housing products. This was particularly the case for dispersed rural areas and for local authorities facing reductions to service budgets.

    - Providing a **range of housing options** was a key challenge for implementing the Positive Pathway Model, and one that many local authorities felt powerless to influence. The more successful local authorities were attempting to use and foster the social rented sector and the Private Rented Sector (PRS) to be more receptive to the needs of younger people. Better 'step down' solutions, the wider use of PRS access projects and the stimulation of well-managed shared housing, can contribute to these ends.

- Overall, local authorities were positive about the impact of the Model. They were most positive about the model's impact on partnership working and homelessness prevention. In contrast, they were least positive about impact on access to affordable and suitable

accommodation. This highlights both the strengths of the Positive Pathway Model and the limitations - which appear to be related to the wider housing and welfare reform contexts.

- Pathways, once established, require maintenance and oversight. The role of a lead officer or coordinator was a critical aspect to the sustainment and improvement of the pathway.

- Many local authorities reported that the number of younger people becoming homeless as a result of an 'unplanned move' had reduced. In particular, single point access hubs were leading to more young people returning home or to moving in with friends or other family members. One local authority reported that its hubs consistently achieved a prevention rate of around 85 per cent.

- For 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless, services have become more flexible and more responsive. Many areas reported that Children's Social Care were taking a lead role for this age group and holding responsibility for their housing and care, be it via a housing solution or a looked after solution.

- Local authorities were using supported accommodation more effectively, aligning it to better meet the needs of younger people.

- The Model's robust and clear nature, supported by advice and support from St Basils, has been influential in achieving 'senior level buy-in' within organisations - which in turn has driven the model's implementation.

- Implementation of the model has resulted in good practice. This is being disseminated across England, and being adopted by others. For example, the Welsh Government has adopted a version of the Positive Pathway Model.[1]

- Local authorities who have engaged in the Positive Pathway model often report becoming more confident in their ability to tackle a problem that previously appeared to be intractable.

- Greater impacts were reported by areas that had adopted the Positive Pathway Model as a central ethos, rather than 'borrowing from it' in a piecemeal fashion.

Recommendations

The Positive Pathway Model is robust, and does not need a major overhaul. The evidence of this rapid evaluation suggests a number of key recommendations.

1. Many local authorities were finding it difficult to provide a range of housing options. But, those taking a more planned, strategic view were looking at influencing their current housing markets to be more responsive to the needs of younger people and seeking out more innovative 'step-down' housing solutions (post commissioned supported housing through their pathways). Also, 'shared housing' was frequently referred to, but without a fuller understanding of how to provide it and (critically) how to manage it. Therefore, the model could be adapted to:

   a. Highlight 'step-down' housing arrangements as distinctive from commissioned accommodation

   b. Consider a more central role for 'sharing solutions' type housing schemes - PRS access projects (often now known as 'help to rent' projects) who can provide younger people with 'smarter' transition into the PRS, procure and manage shared housing and provide some support to tenants. This will become even more applicable as

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[1] http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/services-and-support/homelessness/youth-homelessness/?lang=en

LHA is introduced in the social rented sector and Housing Benefit entitlement for 18-21s changes.

2. Good practice is being disseminated well by the Youth Homelessness Advisors, and this is often cited as a key benefit by local authority officers. However, it was clear from the evaluation that a more informal network of 'good practice advocates' has emerged - competent officers who have taken on elements of the model and developed bespoke policies and practice within their pathways. St Basils and DCLG should consider:

   a. how best to harness these 'good practice advocates' - in a more structured and equitable manner

   b. what other outlets for good practice dissemination are there - seminars; e-seminars; a dedicated web-resource; others?

3. The role of the Youth Homelessness Advisors is crucial to the future implementation of the model, but to gain further traction what is the best strategy? The findings of this report point to a number of possibilities:

   a. expand the capacity of this service by employing more YHAs

   b. expand the capacity by offering more than two days of free consultation

   c. take a more targeted approach - by identifying local authorities that have not taken up support and directly inviting them to do so. This would be more effective if DCLG or St Basils were able to identify the local benefits that could accrue to the local authority.

4. Integrated Hubs are the backbone of the Positive Pathway Model, but some authorities perceive that they can be expensive and complicated to deliver; to a point where local authorities are 'put off' their ambitions to implement one. This is particularly true where Housing and Children's Social Care departments are struggling to work in a more integrated way. Are there ways in which this could be addressed? Perhaps a specific funding scheme or initiative could kick-start this activity in more local authorities.

5. As services became more integrated, local authority officers saw perceptions around housing options changing, especially among 16-25 year olds. But even where local authorities had an integrated hub, it was still felt that more could be done around information provision for young people of secondary school age. Many local authorities reported that engaging with schools was problematic. There may be a need for a more concerted and coordinated effort to 'bring schools on board' with homelessness prevention by involving a range of national and local stakeholders.

6. Although it has not been the direct focus of this report, many local authorities were aware of the work St Basils has done with Barnardo's on developing an accommodation and support framework for care leavers. Local authorities mentioned this work and regarded it as important - seeing it often as the next step (or further development) of their Positive Pathway. It will be worth giving some thought to how these two streams are presented. There may be some merits to keeping them separate - local authorities may require an established Positive Pathway in the first instance in order to provide a framework for enhancing their pathway for young adults leaving care. In addition, the work to implement a Positive Pathway often leads to much improved working practices between Housing and Children's Social Care. However, there were suggestions made that local authorities' rationale for adopting the Positive Pathway Model and seeking support from the Youth Homelessness Advisors was directly related to the outcome of a negative Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care, particularly relating to looked after children.

7. Commissioners are influenced by evidence of impact. The Positive Pathway Model may want to be more explicit about the importance for local authorities of collecting and analysing data on the impact that changes have made to youth homelessness.

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This report presents the key findings from a rapid evaluation of the St Basils 'Positive Pathway' accommodation and support model for young people. The evaluation was commissioned by St Basils and conducted by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University. The funders of the model, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), requested a rapid evaluation to understand more about the model's impact within English local authorities. This report is the main output from this evaluation, and aims to provide St Basils, DCLG, and their partners with a better understanding of the impact and traction that the Positive Pathway Model is having within local authorities and the effectiveness of St Basils' efforts to promote it. Based on these findings, the report makes recommendations with a view to supporting further development and refinement of the model.

1.2 Background

As a group, young people face significant disadvantage in both housing and labour market contexts. Such challenges relate to young people's ability to gain access to housing that they can afford given the limited supply of social housing stock and difficulties accessing the private rented sector. Fewer private rented sector landlords remain in the 'housing benefit market', and young people (up to the age of 35) are only entitled to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) unless they have an exemption.[2]

Evidence shows that young people make up nearly half of people accessing homeless accommodation services.[3] Although the scale of youth homelessness is difficult to quantify, recent research shows that general levels have not improved, either remaining steady or increasing.[4]

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[2] Homeless Link (2013), Nowhere to move, http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/No%20Where%20To%20Move_FINAL.pdf
[3] Homeless Link (2015), Support for Single Homeless People in England: Annual Review, http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Full%20report%20-%20Single%20homelessness%20support%20in%20England%202015.pdf
[4] Clarke, A., Burgess, G., Morris, S. and Udagawa, C. (2015), Estimating the scale of youth homelessness in the UK, Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, University of Cambridge, http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2014/Estimating-the-scale-of-youth-homelessness-in-the-UK/Report/copy_of_Full-Report

Youth homelessness statistics also tend not to factor in elements of homelessness that remain more hidden, such as sofa-surfing. National statistics for England reveal a reduction in the numbers of young people (16-17 year olds and care leavers) accepted as homeless. Table 1.1 shows that local authority acceptances for 16-17 years olds have fallen over the past 6 years; and for care leavers, there was an increase between 2010/11 and 2014/15, but then a reduction in 2015/16. The statistics also reveal that 16-17 year olds and Care Leavers represent a decreasing proportion of the total number of households accepted as homeless.

Table 1.1: Young People Accepted as Statutorily Homeless by Local Authorities in England

Year	16-17s accepted	Care Leavers accepted	% of Total number of households accepted during period
2015-16	535	568	2%
2014-15	577	720	2%
2013-14	781	702	3%
2012-13	1031	692	3%
2011-12	1296	683	4%
2010-11	1594	620	5%

*Source: P1E returns, https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics*

Young people will be specifically affected by future policy changes taking place over the next few years, particularly the removal of automatic entitlement to housing costs for those 18 – 21s claiming Universal Credit (from April 2017) and the introduction of LHA caps in the social rented sector (April 2019). Whilst there are some exemptions, there is considerable concern that the policy change will increase youth homelessness.

From April 2019, the Government intends to align housing costs claims in the social rented housing sector to Local Housing Allowance levels, which includes the Shared Accommodation Rate for under 35 year olds. In most housing market areas, this will take a housing costs claim below the social rent level for a bedsit or 1 bed flat. It remains to be seen how social landlords will respond, for example by developing shared housing products or moving away from renting to under 35s.

The Positive Pathway Model was developed in 2012 by St Basils and DCLG, with input from local authorities and leading practitioners. The Positive Pathway (Figure 1) is 'a flexible framework for local authorities and their partners to use locally to provide a planned approach to homelessness prevention and housing for young people'.[5] The Pathway model was updated in summer 2015 to integrate changes in national policy and legislation, and around public sector funding and service provision. It was revised through a combination of learning from best practice and thinking of how to respond to policy changes.

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[5] St Basils (2015), Developing Positive Pathways to Adulthood: Supporting young people on their journey to economic independence and success through housing advice, options and homelessness prevention, Birmingham, St Basils.

Figure 1.1: The Positive Pathway Model
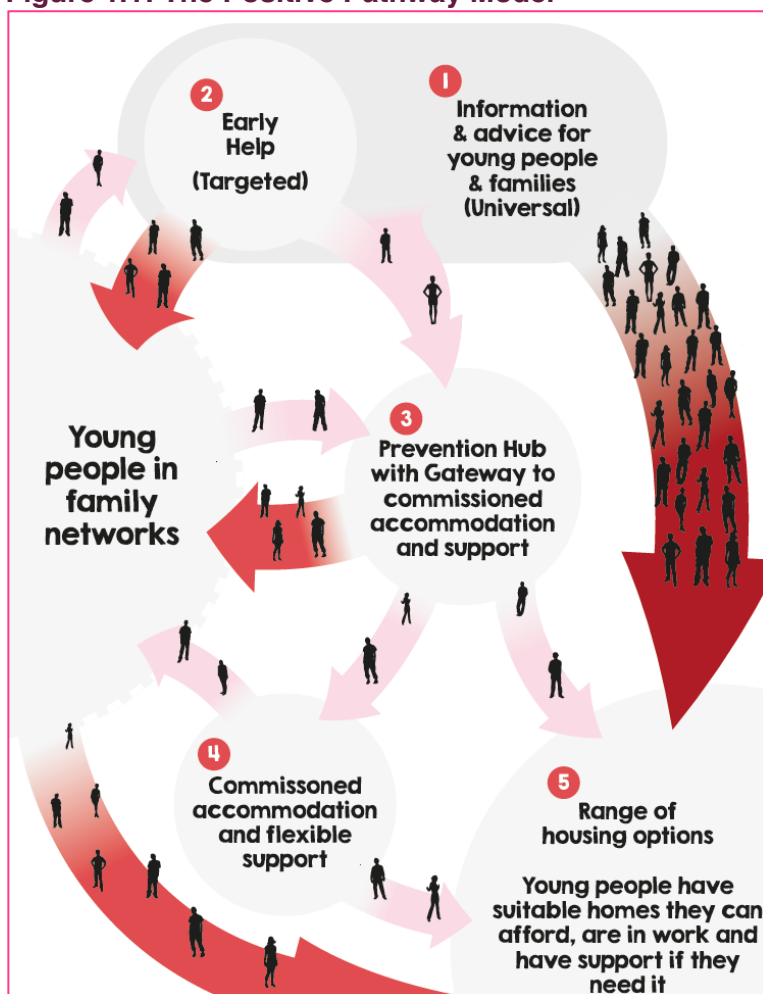
Source: St Basils

The Positive Pathway Model aims to: 'help public service commissioners and providers of services to work together in planning and delivering services for young people recognising that safe, decent and affordable housing underpins achievement of other positive outcomes – whether these relate to education, training, employment, health, or safer communities.[6] Rather than considering homelessness and housing in isolation, the model aims to assist *joint* planning, commissioning and delivery of services.

The revised Pathway model consists of five elements: proposing a universal offer of access to advice and information for young people and their families or carers to help them understand the housing options available to them; focusing on young people at risk of homelessness where there is a need for early intervention and support before a crisis emerges; proposing an integrated service response for those facing homelessness; ensuring a range of accommodation and support options designed for young people; and lastly, putting in place a range of safe, decent, and affordable move-on housing options.

The Pathway is designed to be flexible, adapting to and fitting with local contexts. Through the work of the Youth Homelessness Advisors, St Basils supports local

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[6] St Basils (2015), Developing Positive Pathways to Adulthood: Supporting young people on their journey to economic independence and success through housing advice, options and homelessness prevention, http://www.stbasils.org.uk/files/2015-08-35/10_FINAL_pathwaysA4_booklet_98812.pdf

authorities and their partners in developing an integrated pathway, based on the Positive Pathway Model, which aims to prevent youth homelessness and promotes local housing options for more planned moves from family or care settings. Support is limited to two days per year per authority, and could consist of attending meetings, running workshops or training events and offering telephone and email advice.

Until now, the revised Positive Pathway Model has not been independently evaluated in terms of its impact within English local authorities. However, a survey carried out by Homeless Link in 2015 focused in part on the Positive Pathway Model.[7] The 'Young and Homeless' report focused on the provision of homelessness prevention and support services available to young people, and considers the findings in relation to the Positive Pathway Model. The findings were based on two online surveys with local authority housing departments and voluntary sector homelessness providers.

The survey found that around 64 per cent of local authorities had or were developing a Positive Pathway approach to delivering services to young people at risk of homelessness locally – this had increased from 49 per cent in the previous year. The proportion of cases where youth homelessness was prevented or relieved also increased from 19 per cent to 23 per cent between 2014 and 2015. The survey also revealed signs of improvement in joint working between Housing and Children's Social Care. Despite these positive outcomes, the survey also found gaps: four in ten local authorities (42 per cent) reported that they did not have an adequate range of tools to prevent youth homelessness. In terms of provision, local authorities reported a reduction in both longer term supported housing options for young people and emergency accommodation: 29 per cent of areas reported that hostels or foyers were either not available or less available; and 34 per cent of local authorities reported the same for shared housing with floating support.

1.3   Overview of the Evaluation

This section presents the aims and objectives of the rapid evaluation in more detail and provides an overview of the methodological approach to the project. The focus of the study was to evaluate the impact of the Positive Pathway Model within local authorities, particularly around the following areas:

- homelessness prevention and service improvement

- partnership working within local authorities and with other agencies

- local authority compliance with homeless and other related legislation

- impact on budgets and commissioning practices

- securing better outcomes for young people.

In addition, the evaluation also focused on the role of St Basils and its Youth Homelessness Advisors in developing the model and advising local authorities.

This project was specifically commissioned to evaluate the impact of the Positive Pathway Model on Local Authority policy, practice and provision for younger people facing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. It did not go on to specifically evaluate the impact of any changes local authorities made on younger people's outcomes. The methodology did not include interviews with younger people, nor did

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[7] Homeless Link (2015), Young and Homeless 2015, http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/201512%20-%20Young%20and%20Homeless%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf

it include analysis of local authority monitoring data. However, interviews with staff did probe on the impacts upon younger people.

The methodology was based around four stages, carried out between September and December 2016, as follows.

Stage 1: Inception and scoping

To initiate the project we met with the team at St Basils in order to:

- fully understand St Basils' reasons for commissioning the research (including DCLG's expectations)

- gather background data, and understand where gaps in knowledge existed

- scope and agree the key questions for the rapid evaluation, and

- vary the research approach.

In addition, we carried out **detailed interviews with both Youth Homelessness Advisors** to understand their roles; their approach to working with local authorities and their experiences of promoting the Positive Pathway model throughout the country. This helped to determine key lines of enquiry with local authorities and others for subsequent research activities.

Stage 2: Online Survey of Local Authorities

Stage 2 comprised of an *independent* **survey of Local Authorities** to provide robust evidence of impact. This built on survey work already carried out by Homeless Link and in-house, and took the form of an online survey of local authority officers. We used a software package - SNAP - which simplifies the process and provides confidentiality.

The survey collected factual information on the nature of housing-related services for younger people, the use of Positive Pathway approaches, and the impact it has had. The survey was relatively short - taking less than 15 minutes to complete.

St Basils provided assistance with contacts for key officers to ensure a good response rate through effective targeting. The survey targeted all 326 local authorities. Responses were received from 35 per cent of local authorities in England. The responses were split between:

- 48 per cent - Unitary (including metropolitan districts and London boroughs)

- 44 per cent - Lower tier (district)

- 8 per cent - Upper tier (county).

In terms of coverage, respondents represented a range of different services, reflecting the fact that the Positive Pathway Model has been led by different sections in different local authorities. The services represented by the survey (as self-reported were:

- Housing (general) - 33 per cent

- Homelessness - 28 per cent

- Commissioning - 12 per cent

- Children's social care - 13 per cent
- Housing options - 7 per cent[8]
- Strategic housing - 6 per cent.

Stage 3: In-depth interviews with Local Authorities

To complement the survey, we carried out 17 in-depth interviews with 15 local authorities in England that have engaged with St Basils. These were carried out over the telephone and lasted around 30 minutes each. Of the 17 local authority officers we spoke to, nine worked in Children's Social Care; and eight worked in Housing departments (Housing Options, Homelessness). The local authorities selected for this were sampled on the following basis:

- extent of implementation of Positive Pathway (partially, more fully), and
- type of local authority (unitary, two-tier, different levels of housing need).

Interviews covered topics from the background of key issues facing the local authority in relation to youth homelessness; impressions of the Positive Pathway model; the advice and support local authorities received from the St Basils Youth Homelessness Advisors; how local authorities have implemented the model; the impacts and outcomes the model has had; and how it might sustained in the future.

Stage 4: Case Studies of Local Authorities

We carried out two in-depth case studies with local authorities who had adopted the Positive Pathway model and had benefited from advice and support from the Youth Homelessness Advisors. This provided better evidence of how services worked in partnership; what barriers and challenges existed; and what learning and better practice is available for other local authorities.

In each case study, we spoke with a range of services and stakeholder organisations, including:

- Housing strategy
- Housing needs / options services
- Housing support services
- Children's social care services
- Local authority commissioners
- Information and advice services
- Early intervention programmes
- PRS access projects
- Other housing providers
- Voluntary sector organisations providing accommodation and support.

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[8] These labels are self reported. The reader should bear in mind that in some local authorities, homeless and housing options are a joint service.

1.4   Report Structure

In Chapter 1, the evaluation's objectives and methodology is introduced and the Positive Pathway Model is briefly explained. Chapter 2 discusses the role of St Basils in developing and promoting the Positive Pathway Model and the role of its Youth Homelessness Advisory Service in supporting local authorities to implement the model and improve their approaches to youth homelessness prevention. Chapter 3 explains the way in which the Positive Pathway Model had been used by local authorities. It examines the extent of their engagement, the progress that has been made and how the five distinctive elements of the Model have been implemented.   Finally, Chapter 4 provides an overarching conclusion and recommendations.

The Impact of St Basils Youth Homelessness Advisory Service

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2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the role of St Basils in developing and promoting the Positive Pathway Model. St Basils has worked with DCLG and Local Authorities since 2009 to develop and refine a model pathway for younger people facing homeless, to improve homelessness prevention amongst young people. The first framework was published in 2012. This was last revised in 2015 and is available free of charge from St Basils' website (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1: The Positive Pathway Booklet (August 2015)[9]**

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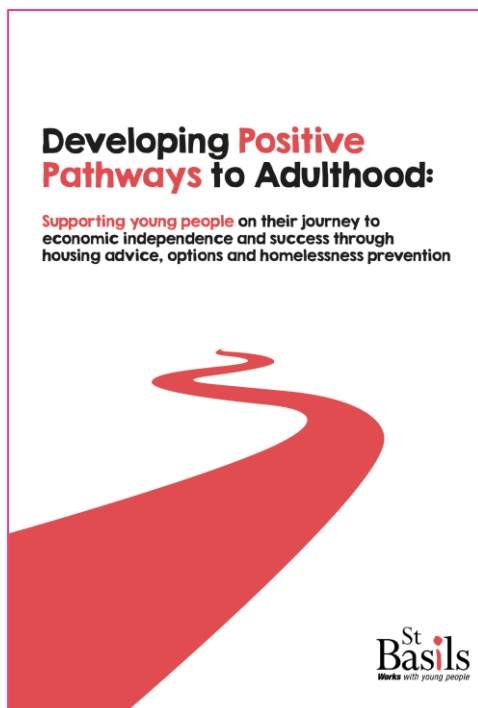
[9] http://www.stbasils.org.uk/files/2015-08-35/10_FINAL_pathwaysA4_booklet_98812.pdf

Alongside this detailed guidance document, St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory Service, funded by DCLG, offer free advice and support to Local Authorities in order to promote the model, but also to work with officers to find policy and practice solutions, overcome implementation challenges and share good practice from across England. At the present time, St Basils employs two part time Youth Homelessness Advisors who offer up to two days consultancy to local authorities free of charge. The Positive Pathway is promoted by St Basils via these activities, its website and by regular emails and newsletters. At present, local authorities approach St Basils to request support from the Youth Homelessness Advisors.

2.2   The Positive Pathway Model

This evaluation found that the Positive Pathway Model was well known amongst local authorities in England. The survey of local authorities asked whether, prior to the survey they were aware of the Positive Pathway Model. It found that over 90 per cent of local authorities felt that they had some knowledge of the model (Figure 2.2). The majority of respondents reported that they had detailed knowledge (29 per cent) or some knowledge (43 per cent). However, around a fifth (21 per cent) reported that they knew about the model, but had 'limited knowledge' of it.

Figure 2.2: Awareness of Positive Pathway Model within the local authority[10]
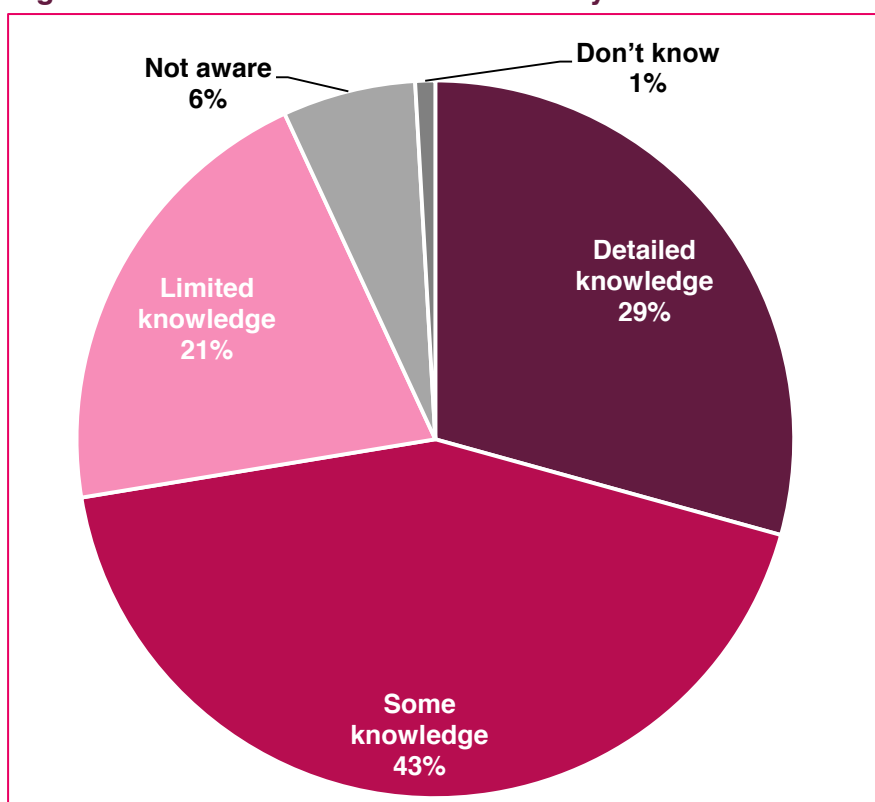
Source: Survey of Local Authorities (N=116)

The survey asked about the use made of the Positive Pathway Model (see Figure 2.3). 40 per cent of local authorities had made use of certain aspects of the model, and a smaller proportion (7 per cent) had used it extensively. Just over a third (36 per cent) of local authorities had so far not used the model but were interested in

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[10] Prior to this survey, were you aware of the Positive Pathway model?, N=116

doing so. There is therefore, significant latent demand for the PP model. The survey also found that very few local authorities (3 per cent) considered that the Positive Pathway Model was not appropriate for them. Of those using the model in some way, a quarter of local authorities had been using it for over three years (26 per cent), 39 per cent had used it for between one and three years and 34 per cent had used it for less than one year. Chapter 3 will expand on local authorities' use of the model, demonstrating that it is not always adopted in full.

Figure 2.3: Use of the Positive Pathway Model by local authorities[11]
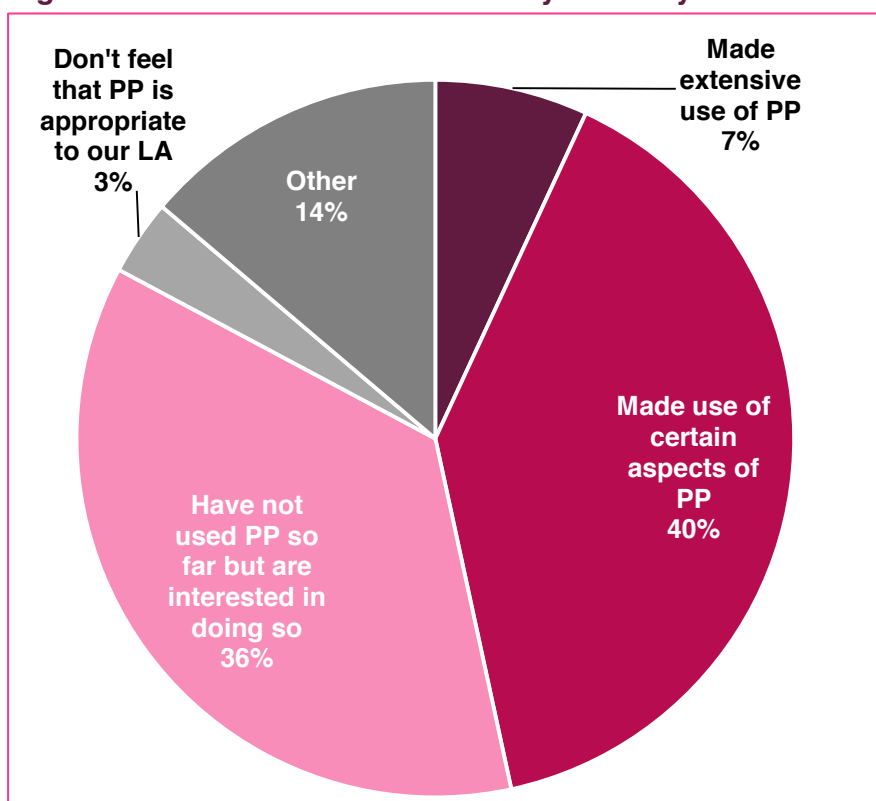
Source: Survey of Local Authorities (N=116)

Respondents to the telephone interviews and case studies were asked to give their broad views on the adequacy of the Positive Pathway Model. Overwhelmingly, respondents were highly positive about it. Many saw it as a straightforward and 'rational' approach to tackling youth homelessness in their local authorities. One respondent summed up these views:

> *The Positive Pathway Model, when you look at it, isn't rocket science; it just puts it in a very good format to show you what you should be doing where.*

Respondents also viewed the model as 'fit for purpose'. In particular, several local authority officers discussed its applicability to the 'way in which local authorities operate', and its appropriateness as an approach to tackle the problem of youth homelessness at a number of critical junctures - prevention, effective assessment, support and advice, and safe and secure housing. One officer for a local authority that had not yet fully adopted the model saw Positive Pathway as a natural solution to making fundamental improvements to their 'offer' to younger people facing homelessness:

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[11] Has your local authority used (or is currently using) the Positive Pathway model?, N=116

It's definitely a model that I like. It's something that I looked at some time ago and in a way it's grown on me more. So the more I dug into what our current situation is and thought about where we want to be, the better it helps structure the way you think about things. So you can see where certain services fit in, you can see where other things don't fit in. In a way what we're doing here is some way down [the model route] in terms of actual commissioning services, but then once these things are in place they don't help us do the best job [providing decent accommodation].

Similarly, several other local authorities had identified the Positive Pathway Model during a review of their services. Some of these reviews were prompted by the landmark *G vs LB Southwark* judgement,[12] which caused local authorities to consider their treatment of 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless. Officers believed that the Positive Pathway Model was directly applicable to addressing this issue. Officers also reflected that the Youth Homelessness Advisors were an invaluable source of expertise and information, able to advise whether they were 'in compliance' with the judgement or not.

> **G vs London Borough of Southwark**
> In May 2009, a landmark judgment in the case of G vs London Borough of Southwark by the House of Lords clarified the law in relation to the provision of accommodation and support for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. The Judgment clarified that for 16 and 17 year olds presenting to a local authority as homeless, children's law takes precedence over housing law.
>
> This therefore gives primary responsibility to Children's Social Care who through Children Act 1989 duties need to assess homeless 16/17 year olds as children in need (section 17) and most cases where homelessness is not prevented offer them the option of becoming a looked after child (section 20). For some local authorities this Judgment has been a catalyst for better working practices between Housing Authorities and Children's Social Care and it has prompted some to begin implementing the Positive Pathway Model to support their joint working.

## 2.3   Advising and Supporting Local Authorities

The evaluation provided strong evidence to suggest that the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service was providing valuable support and advice to local authorities - both in direct relation to implementation of the Positive Pathway Model and more general advice and support around issues associated with youth homelessness policies and practices.

The survey of local authorities asked respondents whether they were aware of the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service run by St Basils. Over three fifths of respondents (61 per cent) were aware of the service and had received some form of support and advice from an advisor. A quarter (26 per cent) were aware of the service but had not yet used it, and 13 per cent stated that they were not aware that St Basils provided this service. Given that St Basils do regularly email all local authorities about the Positive Pathway Model, this is a relatively high figure and it suggests that these communications may be missing their intended target.

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[12] see Shelter's comprehensive briefing note for further information on G vs Southwark - http://tinyurl.com/zvgjvf5

Of those local authorities who had received support from the Youth Homelessness Advisors (N=70), the most common way in which this had been received were meeting with managers/commissioners, running training events for staff and 'other' kinds of support which included developing policies and practices to support a Positive Pathway approach (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Support received from Youth Homelessness Advisory Service[13]
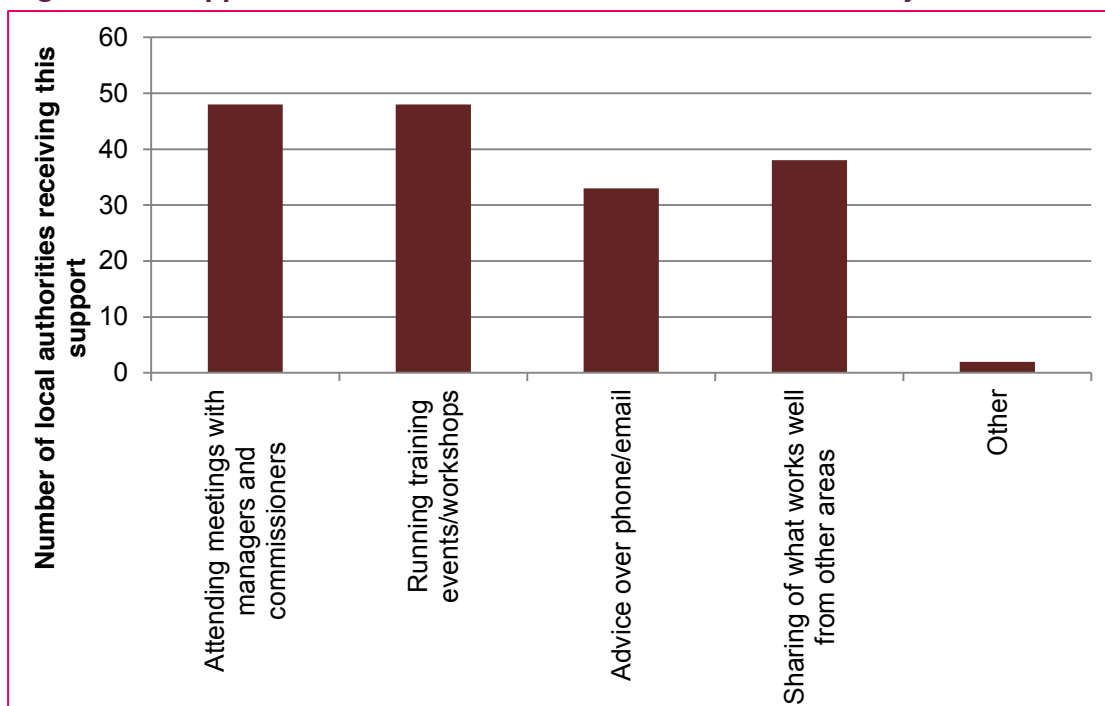
Source: Survey of Local Authorities (N=70)

In terms of the impact of the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service (see Figure 2.5), over 80 per cent of local authorities stated that the support had made a positive difference. Nearly half (46 per cent) reported that it had made a lot of difference and helped a lot to move forward with implementation of an enhanced pathway, and 37 per cent reported that it had made some difference that had resulted in changes being made. Of the 17 per cent that felt the service had not made a difference, answers to the response 'other' revealed that this was often because it was felt to be too soon to tell (a common response) or it was felt that changes were already in train prior to engagement with the service.

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[13] What sort of advice/support did you get from the Youth Homelessness Advisor? N=70

Figure 2.5: Impact of the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service[14]
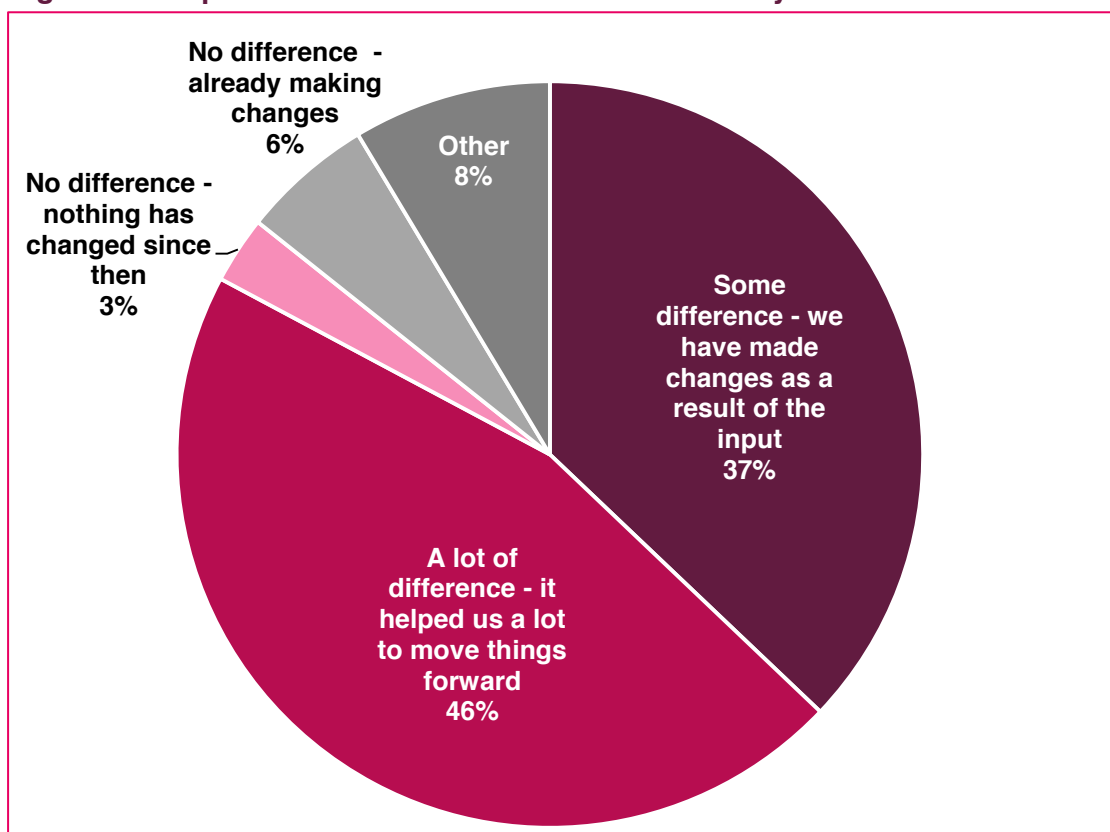
Source: Survey of Local Authorities (N=70)

The survey asked about the quality of the support received from the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service. All respondents reported that it had been positive (N=69). Over half (54 per cent) stated that it had been 'excellent'; 39 per cent stated that it had been 'very good'; and 7 per cent that it had been 'good'.

In terms of the amount of time available to local authorities from the Youth Homelessness Service, (which currently stands at 2 days free of charge per annum), the survey revealed that the majority were happy with this level of service - 62 per cent stated that they had received the 'right amount' of time (N=68). However, 34 per cent would have preferred 'some more time' and a minority (4 per cent) would have preferred 'a lot more time'.

The survey also asked whether local authorities required any additional support, advice or training (to that of the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service). Over half stated 'yes'; 14 per cent stated 'no' and 31 per cent stated 'don't know'. Respondents were asked to record what type of additional support would be useful and answers included:

• training for wider partners (e.g. voluntary sector)

• a central information point with resources and best practice

• support to maintain momentum once initial changes are implemented

• a 'critical friend' to review the effectiveness of changes which have been implemented

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[14] What difference did the advice/support/training make to your provision (if any)? N=70

- training new staff on basics of the model (due to staff turnover).

The survey suggests, overall, that the service levels received from the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service are pegged at the right level, but that local authorities do also require additional support in specific areas. Interviews with local authority officers reinforced these findings and highlighted the value that the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service had.

Interviews highlighted the beneficial support and advice that had been received from the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service. It was apparent that the advisors carried out a range of tasks as part of their consultation with a local authority, and that a tailored approach was taken. The Advisors were responsive to the needs of Local Authorities, rather than prescriptive and this led to positive engagement. Prior to visiting a local authority, the advisor often exchanged emails and had phone conversations with the lead officer to determine what their key issues were, what kind of pathway existed already and what they wanted from the service. Activities then included:

- one-to-one advice and support meetings and promotion of the Positive Pathway Model

- group sessions and workshops with influential senior staff (decision-makers)

- brokerage between different partners

- advice on specific issues (for example, the creation of a younger persons hub, or compliance with the Southwark judgement)

- sharing good practice from elsewhere.

It was reported too, that the Advisors often provided flexibility around the 'two day' engagement, and were always prepared to have follow-up discussions and respond to specific queries and requests once the official period had ended.

Interviewees reported that the Advisors were highly skilled and knowledgeable about youth homelessness policy and practice in local authority settings, and this was the key to making strong impacts. All local authorities are different. Structures, budgets, organisation, working practices and partnership arrangements vary by place. This, in itself, presents a challenge for the Advisors. As one officer stated, *"one size doesn't fit all and we need a solution that works here"*. The evidence suggested that Advisors were very responsive to different local authority conditions, particularly in their ability to identify good practice from other areas and shape it to the needs of the local authority. One local authority for example was interested in creating a youth hub similar to that of St Basils in Birmingham. However, resources to develop it were limited and the local authority did not believe that its third sector partners had the skills and capacity to deliver it. The Advisor helped them to shape a service based on the principles of the Birmingham hub, but also reflected local conditions.

In another local authority, the robust nature of the Model itself and the knowledge of the Advisor had been critical in affecting some change (particularly in a local authority where introduction of a pathway had failed previously):

> *The thinking behind it - the information in the document - is important. I've only had contact with [one Advisor] but that's been very useful in a number of different ways. One of them is that it's good to have someone who's got a national view, so she can say if you're thinking about this, have a look at what Bristol did, or go to Nottinghamshire. We went to see how they manage their situation. I don't think any of it is exactly appropriate to us, but you can borrow bits from it and create your own. So that's been very useful. I think from our*

point of view it's quite useful to have somebody who stands outside of the Council as well.

As Chapter 3 will discuss, effective and improved partnership working between Housing and Children's Social Care was often a key challenge for local authorities looking to adopt the Positive Pathway Model. Officers reported that the Youth Homelessness Advisors had been especially helpful in this respect. One local authority officer explained:

The support we have received from [the Advisor] has been absolutely invaluable. St Basils sent out an email saying they'd been funded further by DCLG and the offer was up to two days working with authorities to look at young people's pathways and anything really around young people and homelessness. At the time we had someone at County who was looking at re-doing the protocol, putting a housing strategy together. What we needed was an expert who we could all respect. [The Advisor] knows what she's talking about. So we could almost get rid of some of the posturing at the beginning. She came and did a session with us which was across the districts… we had Children's Social Care and YOS there as well. [The advisor said] 'this is the context within which you're dealing and this is the legal framework', and that helped enormously. We had a grip on the legal framework anyway - in Housing - but Children's Social Care did not. There's ongoing tension always between the two services; we have worked with the managers to try and get rid of that. And what [the Advisor's] ability was, was to come along as an expert and say this is the legal framework - more to my Children's Social Care colleagues, 'these are the challenges you've got coming up in Housing so when you think your Housing colleagues are being difficult, they're not'. And we saw a few pennies drop in a few senior Children's Social Care workers in a way that we could never have achieved ourselves, so it was invaluable.

As suggested in the transcript above, the advisors had gravitas as nationally recognised mentors, which carried weight with senior staff. One area in which this was particularly important was around issues emanating from the G vs LB Southwark judgement. In many cases, officers discussed how important the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service had been in ensuring compliance with the law relating to 16 and 17 year olds and suggesting how the Positive Pathway Model could be beneficial in addressing deficiencies and gaps in provision. One officer from a two tier authority explained that the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service had been crucial for the local authority after it had been criticised by Ofsted for failing to comply with the Southwark judgment and recognise its significance:

A key point that they really had ability in changing was, prior to this meeting where we met jointly with social services and housing, they were invited by [the] county to go and speak with them and what was being proposed initially was that social services wanted, one of their key priority groups under a new housing related support priority groups would be homeless 16 to 18 year olds and what we had concerns on from a housing perspective was that we've got a lot of people that have specific needs between the 18 and 21 year old category that are currently in supported housing and if they weren't would put themselves at the mercy of the district councils and we might be in a position where we would have no option but to place them in B&B accommodation. That's a point that St Basils argued very strongly [against] with the County who said you can't win with this, and also it's going to affect your partnership working with housing. That point alone was accepted by county. Without the influence of St Basils as an outside body our voice might not have been heard so strongly. So that was excellent.

In some cases, local authorities were clear about the issues and problems they faced. However, others struggled to fully understand their problems. We found several instances where the Youth Homelessness Advisor had been instrumental in identifying key issues. In one local authority, younger people were being offered unsupported secure tenancies in an area of unpopular housing. While the local authority regarded this as positive, tenancy failure and antisocial behaviour rates were high and there were increasing concerns that younger people's wellbeing was not being considered. The Youth Homelessness Advisor worked with the local authority at creating a more appropriate pathway for younger people to supported accommodation rather than secure tenancies, with the aim of providing better life chances, wellbeing and longer term housing prospects.

2.4   Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that local authorities in England regard the Positive Pathway Model as a robust framework, capable of effecting beneficial change to address issues of youth homelessness, flexible enough to adapt to variations in local areas. The model has been successfully implemented in some areas to demonstrate proof that it works. Also, local authority officers had high regard for the work of St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory Service, highlighting their nationally recognised expertise, knowledge and understanding and ability to influence key decision makers and, in so doing, forge better partnerships, particularly between Housing and Children's Social Care.

The following key evaluation points emerged from this chapter:

- The Positive Pathway Model is well known amongst Local Authorities in England. The survey found that 90 per cent of local authorities had some knowledge of the model. However, this knowledge was limited for a fifth of local authorities, and 6 per cent reported no prior understanding of the model.

- The Positive Pathway Model has been used extensively in English local authorities (see Figure 2.3). While 7 per cent had used it extensively, 40 per cent of local authorities had made use of certain aspects of the model, suggesting that local authorities often adopt key aspects of the model.

- There is, therefore, significant latent demand for the Positive Pathway Model. Just over a third (36 per cent) of local authorities had so far not used the Model but were interested in doing so.

- Local authorities with knowledge of the Positive Pathway Model regarded it as a robust, developed and 'fit for purpose' tool, capable of improving pathways for younger people facing homelessness.

- St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory Service was providing valuable support and advice to local authorities - both in direct relation to implementation of the Positive Pathway Model and more general advice and support around issues associated with youth homelessness policies and practices.

- Awareness of the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service was high. Over 60 per cent of local authorities had benefited from the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service. However a quarter of local authorities were aware of the service, but had not used it; and 13 per cent were not aware of it.

- The Youth Homelessness Advisory Service had made a significant impact on the local authorities that had engaged with it. Nearly half (46 per cent) reported that the service had made a lot of difference and helped a lot to move forward with implementation of an enhanced pathway, and 37 per cent reported that it had made some difference that had resulted in changes being made.

- The Youth Homelessness Advisory Service was regarded by local authorities to be of high quality. Over half (54 per cent) of local authorities rated the service as 'excellent'; 39 per cent rated it 'very good'; and 7 per cent rated it 'good'. No respondents rated it negatively.

- Local Authorities were generally satisfied with the amount of advice and support they received from the Youth Homelessness Advisory Service. At the current delivery level of two days free of charge, the majority of local authorities (62 per cent) reported this to be the right level of service, though a third would have preferred some more time. In many cases, Advisors offered advice and support above this amount, especially for follow-up questions and queries. In addition, the survey found that around half of local authorities would like additional support to implement the Positive Pathway Model.

- Advisors were particularly well regarded for having the following attributes:

    - highly skilled and knowledgeable about youth homelessness policy and practice in local authority settings

    - the ability to identify good practice from other areas and shape it to the needs of the local authority

    - having gravitas as nationally recognised mentors, which carried weight with senior staff and helped to forge partnerships (in particular between Housing and Children's Social Care).

3

Local Authority Implementation of the Positive Pathway Model

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the way in which the Positive Pathway Model has been used by local authorities. It examines the extent of their engagement, the progress that has been made and how the five distinctive elements of the Model (see Figure 1.1) have been implemented. The chapter begins with a brief overview of issues facing local authorities, and then evaluates the implementation of the Positive Pathway Model. The key points are then summarised in Section 3.4.

3.2 Broad Issues facing Local Authorities

As we highlighted in Chapter 1, austerity measures, changes to the welfare state and issues of growing poverty are placing increasing burdens on local authorities as they attempt to respond to challenges such as youth homelessness. Furthermore, children's social care departments in many areas are under intense pressure and inadequate supply of affordable and appropriate housing remains a national issue.
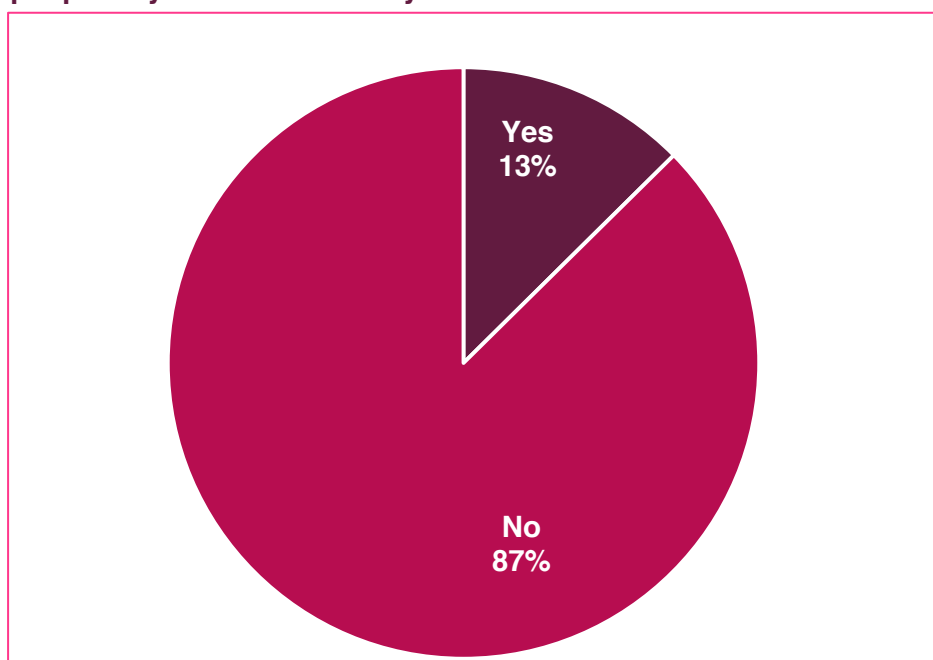
The survey of local authorities asked some broad contextual questions. Firstly, local authorities were asked whether they had a specific strategy to tackle youth homelessness. Around one-half of local authorities (48 per cent) reported that they did have a strategy that specifically refers to youth homelessness. Of the local authorities who reported not having a specific strategy, their reasons for this fell into three categories:

- youth homelessness was covered by specific protocols (e.g. with children services)

- youth homelessness was addressed within a wider homelessness strategy

- a strategy was in development.

Clearly, therefore, there is evidence that local authorities in England are addressing youth homelessness in a strategic manner. However, only half of local authorities were giving the issue specific focus.

The limits of the impact of the Positive Pathway Model may be better understood by assessing the wider context for Youth Homelessness services. Figure 3.1 highlights local authority views on whether there is sufficient affordable accommodation for young people. The vast majority (87 per cent) reported that there was insufficient affordable accommodation for young people in their area.

Figure 3.1: Is there sufficient choice of affordable accommodation for younger people in your local authority area?[15]

Source: Survey of Local Authorities, N=103

In terms of changes in levels of youth homelessness (see Figure 3.2), almost half of local authorities (46 per cent) thought the number of young people presenting as homeless had stayed roughly the same, but around one-third of local authorities (30 per cent) thought that the number had increased in the last year. It was notable that a small proportion thought the number had declined (13 per cent). This may reflect the considerable regional variation in homelessness trends which have been noted in recent years.[16]

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[15] N=103
[16] Fitzpatrick, S. et al (2016) *Homelessness Monitor: England*, London: Crisis.

Figure 3.2: Change in the number of young people presenting as homeless to your local authority in the last 12 months[17]
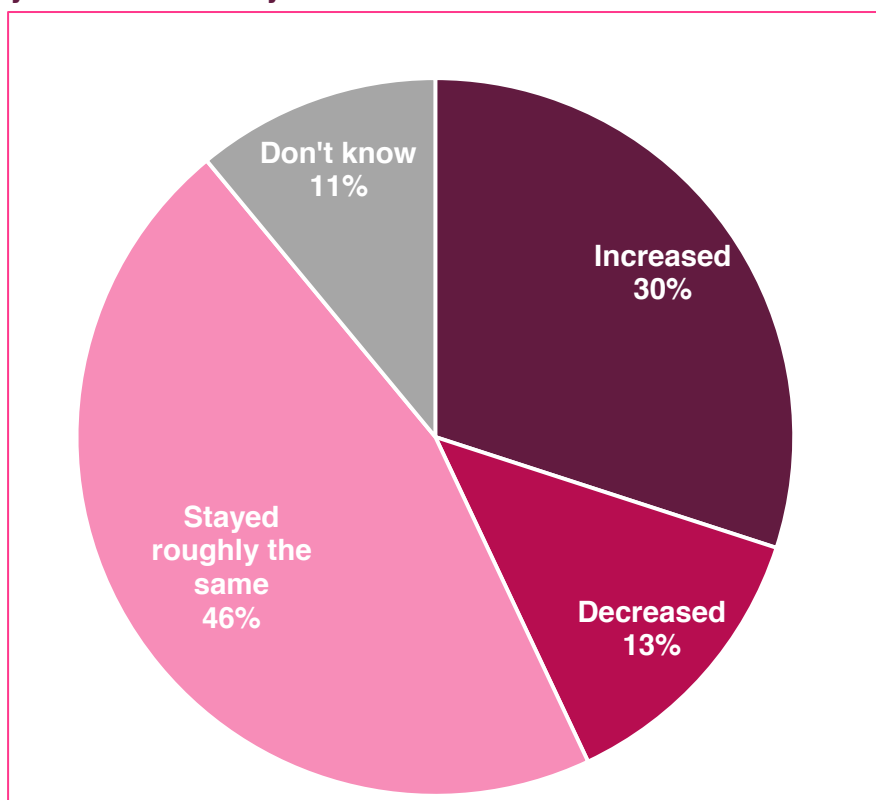
Source: Survey of Local Authorities, N=100

The survey also provided evidence of the impact of changes to the welfare state. Local authorities were asked about plans to change provision or ways of working around youth homelessness in the light of welfare reforms. 45 per cent of local authorities were planning to change provision in response to welfare reforms, though 37 per cent were not planning to change provision at present. Again, this may reflect the unevenness of the impact of welfare reform that recent research has highlighted.[18]

The survey also asked about the impact of the forthcoming Homelessness Reduction Bill,[19] and whether this would prompt changes to provision. As might be expected, two thirds of local authorities reported that it was too early to tell. However, nearly one-fifth stated that they were planning to change provision in light of the Bill and 13 per cent stated that they were not planning to change their homeless provision at present. This is an issue that St Basils Youth Homelessness Advisory Service will wish to address with local authorities, and it is likely that a higher proportion of local authorities will consider making changes.

Interviews with local authority officers and other organisations gave an indication into the kinds of challenges they faced in relation to youth homelessness. The following were the key issues:

- Increased presentations from younger people with more complex needs.

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[17] Over the last 12 months, has the number of young people presenting as homeless to your local authority? (N=100)
[18] Beatty, C. and Fothergill, S. (2016) *The Uneven Impact of Welfare Reform: The financial losses to places and people*, Sheffield: CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University. (http://tinyurl.com/j88ex3j)
[19] http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/homelessnessreduction.html

- An increase in people who are presenting as homeless due to changes to the welfare state - most notably, changes to the local housing allowance.

- A shortage of supported and temporary accommodation (and a shortage of providers locally). Also, there are distinctive challenges for two-tier local authorities in forging partnerships between County services and multiple housing authorities.

- Poor working relationships between key agencies; particularly housing and children's social care, but also between the local authority and third sector organisations.

- Restricted access to, and a shortage of, affordable housing for younger people.

- Continuing (and increasing) austerity measures leading to smaller public sector budgets, which are driving reductions to core support services and accommodation.

- Increasing numbers of looked after children in some areas.[20]

- New and unexpected challenges - a rise in the numbers of unaccompanied children and young people seeking asylum, including children and young people from the Calais encampment, and those children and young people largely from Syria who already have refugee status when they arrive.

3.3 Strategic Development and Partnerships in Local Authorities

In terms of local authority strategic processes, the survey showed that the Positive Pathway Model had a very positive impact in certain key respects (see Figure 3.3). Within the local authority, the model was most effective in relation to supporting a strategic and collaborative approach to youth homelessness (80 per cent thought there had been some or a major improvement), this is important as it provides a solid basis for developing a robust pathway. Similarly, the model also had a positive impact on local authorities' ability to monitor and understand the impacts that their services have; their ability to understand the needs of younger people at risk of homelessness and their approach to data sharing.

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[20] DFE (2016) *Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016*, Reference SFR 41/2016, Crown Copyright 2016.

Figure 3.3: Impact of the Positive Pathway Model in key strategic aspects
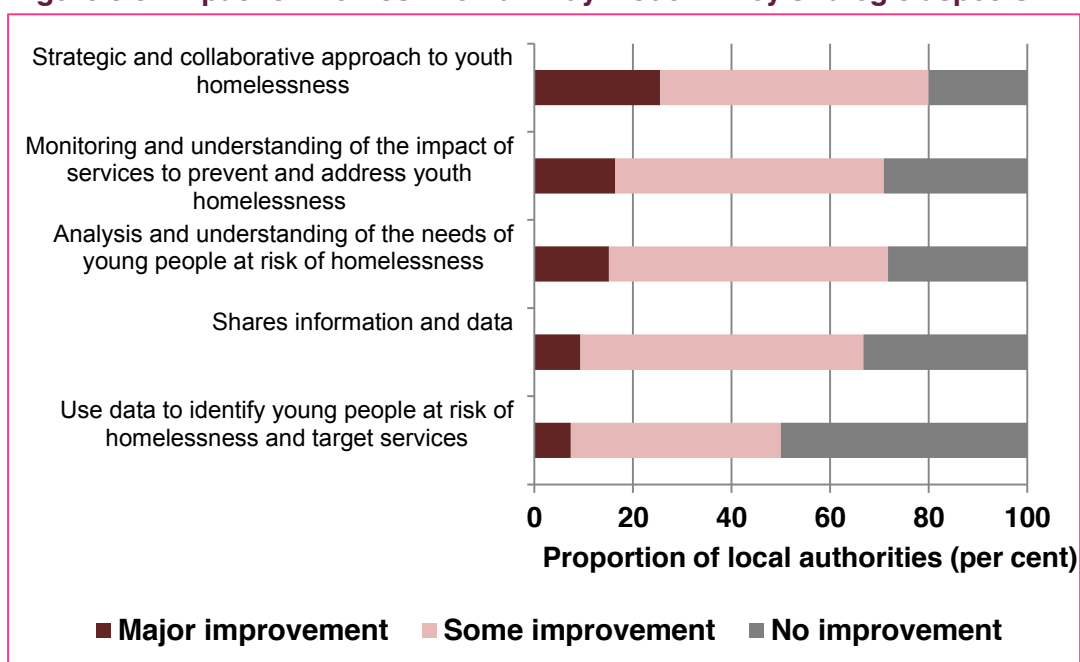
Source: Survey of Local Authorities, N=58

The Positive Pathway Model had less impact in supporting local authorities to use data to identify young people at risk of homelessness and target services. However, even in this area half of local authorities thought there had been some or a major improvement.

As Figure 3.3 above demonstrated, the Positive Pathway Model had made positive impacts on the broad strategic direction. Even where a robust pathway had yet to be developed, local authority officers reported that the Model, and St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory Service, had focused their attention towards properly identifying the problem and addressing it. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the Youth Homelessness Advisors were central to this, by their ability to bring different parts of local authorities together. In particular, the Positive Pathway Model has helped to develop improved working relationships between housing authorities and children's social care departments, both within unitary authorities and two-tier authorities.[21]

The Southwark Judgement in 2009 exposed weaknesses in the way that housing authorities and children's social care worked in partnership, and how 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless were served. Interviews for this project highlighted clearly that this alone had been a catalyst for change and that the Positive Pathway Model provided a framework for addressing the problem. One local authority officer explained that they had, in the past, made several failed attempts to forge a partnership between housing and children's social care, including joint commissioning, to better tackle youth homelessness. The officer explained the difficulties faced engaging children's social care:

It's difficult, I think we've tried in the past and got nowhere. We had an initial meeting and the person we wanted to come didn't turn up, they sent somebody else who just came and said 'we commission everything through [another framework] so that's it basically'. And then they say things like 'well we don't put our young people in your services' and it's patently not true.

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[21] In two-tier Local Authorities, social services and educations functions sit with the County Council and housing functions sit with the constituent District Councils.

The local authority was going to try again, but using the Positive Pathway Model as a framework for doing so. They had drawn on the support of St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory Service to get the ball rolling. This had led to a workshop attended by senior staff from children's social care where agreements had been established to start setting up an integrated hub for referrals from young people staffed by social work and housing officers.

In other areas, where the Positive Pathway Model had been implemented more fully, a key positive outcome had been better partnership working. In another area with a poor history of joint working (a two-tier authority), adopting a Positive Pathway approach had directly led to closer working practices between a range of partners. There is now a monthly 'Accommodation Panel' meeting in each district council area attended by key partners including Children's Social Care, supported housing providers, outreach services, and the local housing authorities. The County's lead officer explained how this was working and what benefits stemmed from it:

> *We really make sure we use those meetings in as targeted and problem-solving way as possible. We're now just moving to looking at trying to standardise them across the County. We've just implemented a spreadsheet which is designed to do that which is very clear that it's targeted on four categories of young people: those who are not in the pathway but are unlikely to come in either because they're not engaging or because they've got risks or histories or something which means it would be really difficult to bring them in to the pathway; another group is those who are in the pathway but not making any progress; there are those who are in the pathway but are likely to be ejected from the pathway so might be at significant risk of losing their tenancy; and the fourth is looking at move-on so looking at those who are basically ready for move-on but have a specific barrier, for example arrears; and then there's a separate category where we ask the local housing authority to bring a list of all of the young people who are in the pathway but are currently bidding to make sure that we are all trying to access private rented stock. That's very much a multi-agency problem-solving group; it's about having all of those partners round the table to look at how we intervene at this point to move things on in a positive way.*

Another two-tier authority had been successful in forging partnerships in order to implement a Positive Pathway, and their pathway coordinator was asked about the challenges faced:

> *Probably getting people to come out of their silos, getting them to take a chance on something that was quite different. I think back then we were very much stuck in the Supporting People[22] world and authorities particularly were used to having services laid in front of them and they could pick and choose what they wanted, the idea that we were going to take it from the young person's point of view and allow the young person to travel on a pathway that would meet their outcomes was quite alien to them. They just wanted a service to be available as and when they needed them, not necessarily thinking about the outcomes for the young person. It took a hell of a lot of partnership working, getting them on board and to explain to the partners - a lot of battles for a while to get them to see the direction we were trying to go in. Once they got it, it was brilliant, but it did take a while. Interestingly I think the ones we found harder were not necessarily the housing partners, they came on board quite quickly, it was more*

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[22] The Supporting People programme was a government initiative launched in 2003, aimed at providing housing-related support services for disadvantaged and vulnerable people. A ring fenced budget protected funding until 2010 and the national programme no longer exists. Over several years, but particularly since 2011/12, local authorities' Supporting People budgets have declined significantly.

organisations such as leaving care - statutory functions - they really struggled with the idea that this will meet the needs of younger people in a different way.

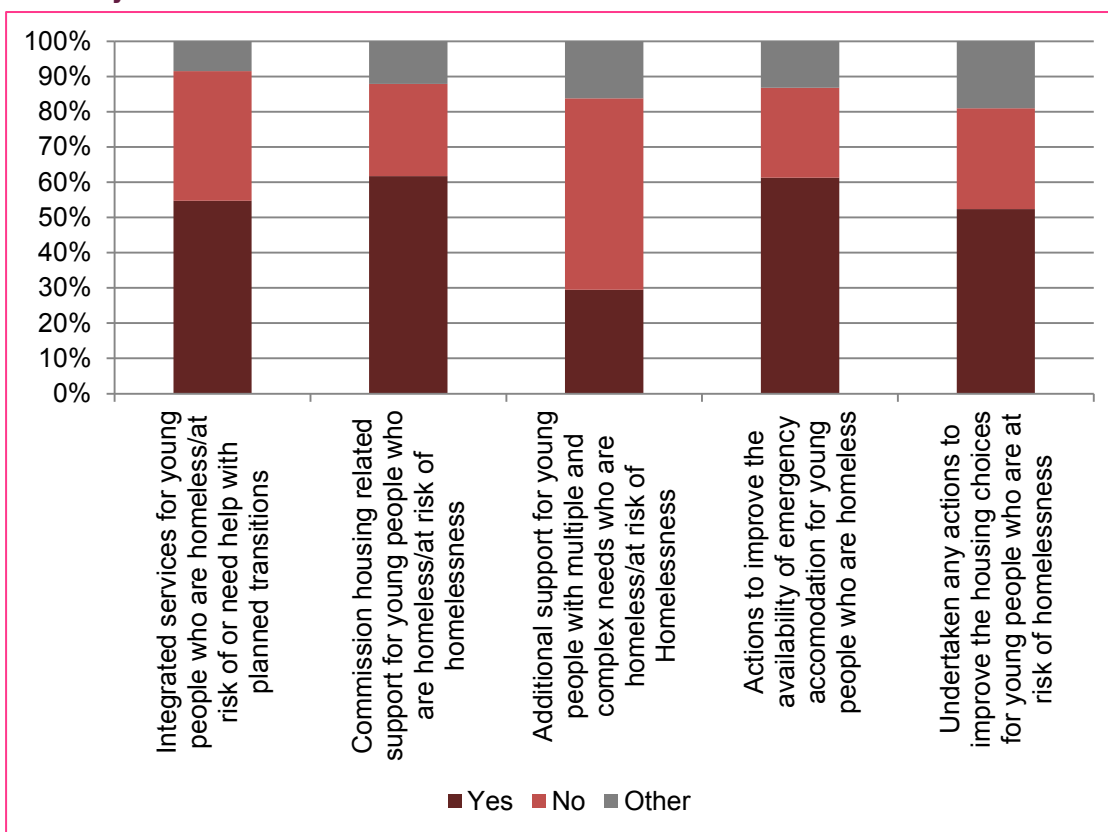## 3.4 The Overall Impact of the Positive Pathway Model on Local Authorities

This section draws mainly on evidence from the survey of local authorities to demonstrate the impact that the Positive Pathway Model is having. It provides key data that subsequent sections will draw on to look at the impact of the Positive Pathway Model in more detail.

The survey asked about the extent to which local authorities had engaged with different aspects of the Positive Pathway model and found that there has been a degree of traction. Local authorities are clearly using the Positive Pathway Model to shape their services and improve their responses to youth homelessness. However in terms of key elements of the model, it was clear that these had been implemented to a greater and lesser extent. The survey found the following in relation to support and provision:

- Early intervention services that support young people who are at risk of homelessness were directly provided by nearly half of local authorities (47 per cent), and indirectly provided by another organisation in a quarter of local authorities (25 per cent). One in five local authorities did not have an early intervention service that supported youth homelessness prevention.

- 37 per cent of local authorities had dedicated information and advice services that specifically target young people and their families; and 40 per cent had general information and advice services that young people may access.

- Only a quarter of local authorities provided direct training and support for youth homelessness prevention to young people, their families or teachers, either directly (13 per cent) or through another organisation (22 per cent).

Figure 3.3 highlights engagement with four different aspects of the model. It suggests that areas where local authorities have been more actively engaging with the Positive Pathway Model include; emergency accommodation for homeless young people (62 per cent) and commissioning housing related support for this group (61 per cent). Fewer local authorities were seeking to provide additional support for young people with multiple and complex needs (29 per cent). However, the qualitative enquiry revealed that some local authority officers recognised that they were seeing increasing numbers of younger people with multiple and complex needs, and several commissioners were actively planning how to meet these needs.

Figure 3.4: Local authority engagement with different aspects of Positive Pathway Model
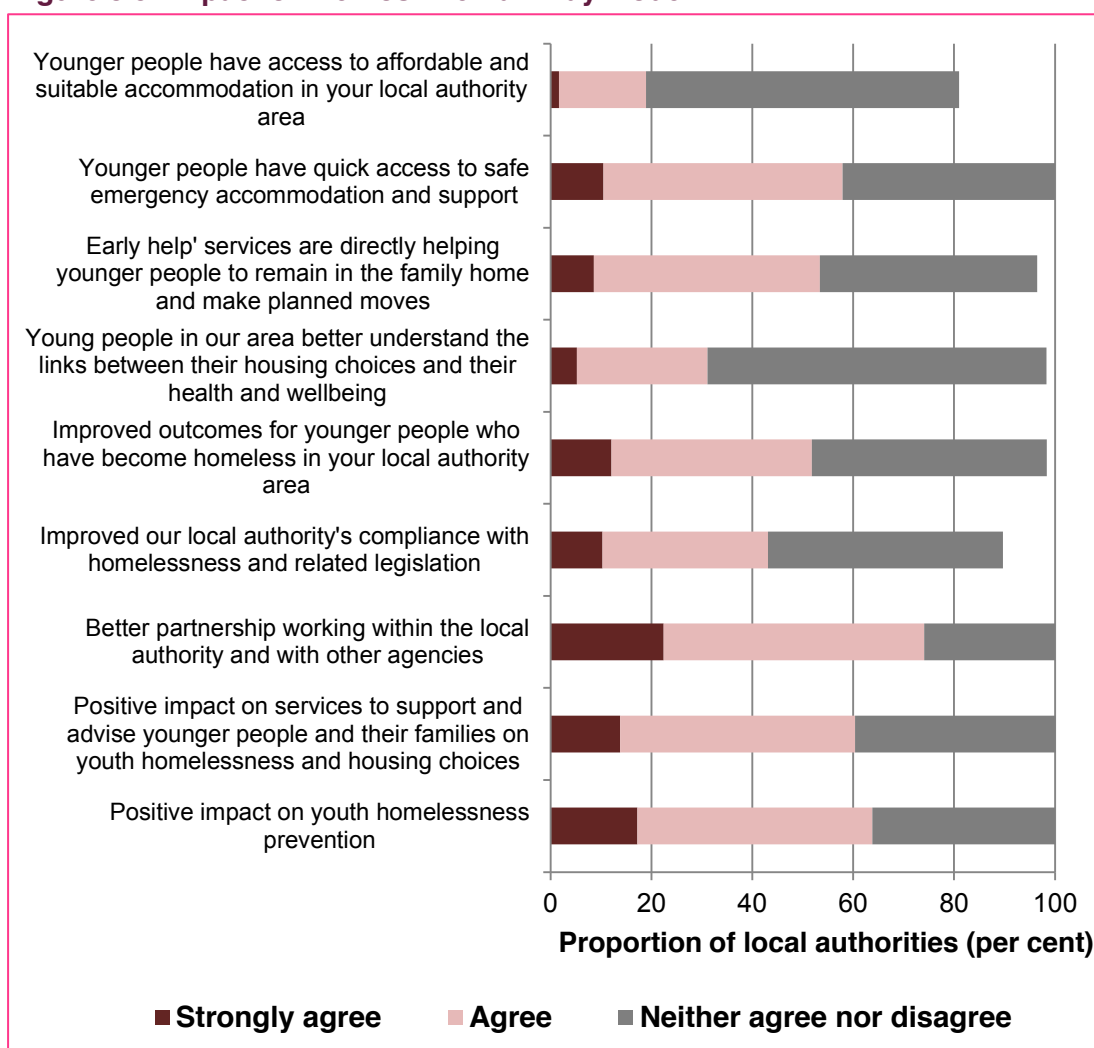

Source: Survey of Local Authorities, N=varies[23]

The survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which the Positive Pathway Model had made an impact on the local authority (see Figure 3.4). Overall, the findings show that there has been a positive impact in key areas. However, there are important variations and it was clear from the evidence gathered from local authority officer interviews and case studies that a) many local authorities have insufficient ways of measuring outcomes and b) local authorities often report that impact can only be properly measured once more time has elapsed. Of course, these key areas are not all equal, and some are 'harder fixes' than others - providing affordable housing, for instance, was reported to be one of the toughest aspects of the pathway to implement - whereas support and advice services often required minor changes to existing universal provision. Some key variations were:

- A significant proportion of local authorities agreed or strongly agreed about the model's impact on these aspects: partnership working (74 per cent); provision of advice and support (60 per cent); and homelessness prevention (64 per cent).

- Fewer local Authorities agreed or strongly agreed that the model had impacted on these aspects: access to affordable and suitable accommodation (2 per cent strongly agree and 17 per cent agree); and younger people being able to understand the links between their housing choices and their wellbeing without drawing on specialist services (5 per cent strongly agree and 26 per cent agree).

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[23] Does your local authority have integrated services for young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or need help with planned transitions? (N=106). Does your local authority commission housing related support for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness? (N=107). Does your local authority commission or provide any additional support for young people with multiple and complex needs who are homeless or at risk of homelessness? (N=105). Has your local authority undertaken any actions to improve the availability of emergency accommodation for young people who are homeless? (N=106).

Figure 3.5: Impact of the Positive Pathway Model

Source: Survey of Local Authorities, N=58

Evidence from interviews with local authorities and in case studies suggested that, overall, the Positive Pathway Model had made significant positive impacts in the following ways:

- Many local authorities reported that the number of young people becoming homeless as a result of an 'unplanned move' had reduced, and that pathways were playing a key role in homelessness prevention. In particular, single point access hubs, where young people could be properly assessed, were leading to more people returning home or moving in with friends and other family members. One area reported that their hubs consistently achieved a prevention rate of around 85 per cent.

- For 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless, services have become more flexible and more responsive. Many areas reported that children's social care were taking a lead role for this age group and holding responsibility for their housing and care, be it via a housing solution (such as a placement in supported housing) or a care-related solution (such as fostering).

- Local authorities were using supported accommodation more effectively, aligning it to better meet the needs of young people. Coordination of different service providers had also been improved, which provided better consistency of service and greater understanding of what supported housing was achieving for this client group.

I think it creates this structure for us to better manage young people once they're in supported accommodation and kind of keep an eye on what's happening.

- Progress has been made in partnerships and integrated working practices, most importantly between housing authorities and children's social care, but also with a range of stakeholders along the pathway - housing and support providers.

- The Model's robust and clear nature, supported by advice and support from St Basils, has been influential in achieving 'senior level buy-in' within organisations - which in turn has driven the Model's implementation. It has also proved very capable of being implemented in very different local authorities.

  The beauty of the pathway model is you can make it your own, use it in principle. Our pathway will look very different to someone else's, but having the framework around it is really helpful. It covers everything; I don't think there's anything missing.

- As a result of St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory service, good practice is being disseminated across England, and being adopted by others.

  […] the work done by St Basils has really informed, but also highlighted, good practice where it may be occurring. And it's also given staff the option to think about if there are shortcomings we can look at that model and adopt it accordingly.

- Local authorities who have adopted the Positive Pathway Model often report becoming more confident in their ability to tackle a problem that, previously, appeared to be intractable. For example, since its adoption of a positive pathway, one local authority started to address its issue of high tenancy failure amongst 18-25 year olds; made possible because there is a clearer range of housing and support options available to younger people.

- Greater impacts were reported by areas that had adopted the Positive Pathway Model as a central ethos, rather than 'borrowing from it' in a piecemeal fashion.

  I think they'll find that it's a weakness [to adopting only parts of the Model]. To a certain extent we did a similar thing at the beginning. I think now we've really had to look at the areas that we didn't put as much strength into at the beginning and it's now obvious that they're the gaps that we didn't focus on. So I think it's important to try and focus as much as possible on each area. We didn't put enough focus on move on and now we have to do a lot of work in that area.

- Pathways, once established, require maintenance and oversight. The role of a lead officer or coordinator was a critical aspect to the sustainment and improvement of the pathway.

  It is a whole approach. When I talk about young people's pathway I talk about the whole of the workforce, there's about 90 of them. I keep a training matrix […] and I send out a workforce bulletin every six months to that team to say this is what we're doing, so if you're in [xx] you can see what's happening in [xx].

The following sections will look at the Positive Pathway Model in relation to its five distinctive service areas, drawing on evidence from interviews with local authority officers and the case studies.

3.5   Impact in the Five Service Areas

This section will take each of the five service areas of the Positive Pathway Model (see Figure 1.1) and outline briefly ways in which local authorities have seen impacts from implementing the model.

Information and Advice for Young People and Families (Service Area 1)

> **1. Information and advice for young people and families**
>
> **The Service:** Timely, accurate information and advice about housing options available to everyone, delivered in a range of ways including web-based information and through schools to reach young people, families and professionals.
>
> **Desired result:** Young people and families are empowered to plan transitions to independent living without support from specialist services. They understand the links between housing choice and their financial end employment situation. They know where to get help if they need it.
>
> *Source: St Basils*

In this stage of the Pathway, some local authorities reported that these universal services existed within their areas, but were required to be more responsive to the needs of younger children and their families, more focused on homelessness prevention and more accessible for hard to reach groups. The two case studies revealed that where such universal services existed they were often ill-equipped to provide advice and support to families and play a role in youth homelessness prevention. One common theme was that many communities still believed that the 'council' would automatically rehouse their children if they presented to the council as homeless. This is rarely the case, with the exception of some areas with low demand housing stock who have not implemented the Positive Pathway Model or similar. For other areas, it was clear that this homelessness prevention message was not fully reaching communities.

There was strong evidence, however, that the Positive Pathway Model was refocussing local authorities' attention on preventative work. In one local authority, younger people presenting as homeless were, in the past, offered tenancies in vacant council housing stock. Their lead officer explained what had happened to their prevention work:

> We'd just neglected it. It slipped off the agenda. We're not all that short of housing for young people in [local town]. It's not great quality, but you know … we'd not missed the fact that we had a youth homelessness problem, but we thought we were handling it OK because we had vacants (sic), and we'd lost sight of actually trying to reduce numbers. So, the Positive Pathway has been great at making us look specifically at prevention.

In local authorities where the Positive Pathway Model was more advanced, it was apparent that direct action was being taken to improve information and advice services relating to youth homelessness, as a result of this 'refocussing on prevention'. In one area, for example, the local authority was drawing up a new information booklet for younger people and their families aimed at a) delivering key messages about youth homelessness, and b) ensuring that people know where to

seek advice and support before taking actions that could result in homelessness. This was being co-produced by Housing and Children's Social Care:

> *[We're producing] something from Housing and Children's Services for young people, to give them a universal information guide. Because it's not just about the Housing, it's their behaviour leading up to wanting to be housed that can cause an issue, and letting them understand that they won't automatically get something [housing] just cause they're homeless.*

Another common problem was the lack of engagement with schools in some areas. In part, the paucity of advice and support was associated with funding issues, but several officers reported schools were difficult to engage with and unwilling to provide access for staff to present homelessness prevention training to pupils. One officer explained how both these factors had undermined information and advice services:

> *There's still a real desire to get that preventative work done in the schools but nobody's got the resource to do it and nobody's got the actual bodies on the ground to go out there and do the work. But before [recent budget reductions] the county ran roadshows on changes in welfare and benefits, housing.*

However, others were being more successful with schools by specifically commissioning a service:

> *We've commissioned something which involves going into schools and talking through the reality of what it means to be not in your own home at a young age. And we do some fantastic work with [the trainer] and she runs these sessions and she says to a young person: "You're going to set up a home. Here's the Argos catalogue - what do you think you're going to need in each room? […] Pick the stuff out and see how much it costs".*

Early Help (Service Area 2)

2. Early Help

The Service: Early intervention targeted to reach households where young people are most likely to be at risk of homelessness, in addition to 1). Delivery involving all local services working with young people and families at risk, e.g. Troubled Families programme, Family Support, Youth Support and Youth Offending Services.

Desired result: Young people stay in the family network where possible and safe and are supported to make planned moves if they need to move out.

Source: St Basils

Early Help was an area where there was often some confusion amongst local authorities on what it meant and how it could be used to achieve youth homelessness prevention benefits. In particular, local authorities often blurred the lines between Early Help and direct support to younger people, for example via services provided in an integrated hub (which is stage 3 of the model) that directly supported younger people presenting as homeless. The Positive Pathway Model, however, regards Early Help in local authorities as early, but targeted, support to

children, young people and families, which is relatively low-level. The Model pegs Early Help squarely as a form of primary or early homelessness prevention - engaging with younger people and their families before the risk of homelessness is evident. Indeed, many of the early indicators for homelessness (such as school absence, involvement in offending, running away from home, substance misuse and violence at home) are the kinds of issues that Early Help services are responding to.

While many local authorities have recently introduced Early Help services, there are variations in these services, both in their intentions and their reach, as was found in a 2015 Ofsted inspection of Early Help across England.[24] Often, local authorities would report that they had such services as a part of their pathway; however it was often unclear whether services were being effectively refocused and aligned to youth homelessness prevention.

Furthermore, part of the confusion also stemmed from the fact that some local authorities were directing staff resources from their Early Help service into an integrated hub. This was, therefore, supporting stage 3 of the Pathway (the hub), but doing less to utilise the service for very early, primary youth homelessness prevention.

There was evidence from local authorities that, often, their Early Help services were not necessarily designed and programmed to respond adequately to youth homelessness prevention aims. St Basils YHAs suggested that Early Help services were not always sufficiently well informed about the negative impacts of youth homelessness and their role in prevention. For local authorities who had adopted the Positive Pathway Model, this continued to be an area for improvement, and there was evidence that, with the assistance of the YHAs, local authorities were actively tackling the problem. For example, one local authority officer was trying to 'get homelessness prevention on the agenda' of their early intervention service, as part of a Positive Pathway implementation:

> We've got a fragmented approach to prevention in terms of adolescents and preventing homelessness. [Our] Early Help generally focused on younger children rather than adolescents and young adults so, often, if you've got a family with difficulties, I think often […] wherever they are in the system the response seems to be 'get the older teenager out of the house' […] without thinking about where that young person is going to live.

As we outlined above, local authorities sometimes misinterpreted stage 2 of the Model, and this was apparent when officers were asked to explain their approach to youth homelessness prevention. In one local authority, for example, prevention was articulated exclusively as service provision at the point of need - the point at which somebody presents as homeless. The following quote highlights this:

> If we've got young people who turn up at Housing Options and they're looking for some help and assistance, if we consider them to be vulnerable we have these workers who will support the young people and we have a whole process to wrap around them. It's improving relationships because we're getting some good results. We're preventing quite a lot of young people becoming homeless. Quite a lot of them are returning to their family. 20-25 per cent [are] going into care and most returning home, to extended family or into something like a Foyer.

Similarly, another local authority also referred to prevention in terms of direct support for young people facing homelessness. While it was not an activity that could be

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[24] http://tinyurl.com/z656fy4

regarded as being related to stage 2 of the model, it was an innovative approach that was responding effectively to youth homelessness - and was becoming a key element in their pathway. The new approach, being piloted by a voluntary sector provider, [25] takes an 'assets based' approach to supporting vulnerable young adults:

This is not about providing accommodation, but an inspirational coaching model where you meet the young person and inspire them and get them to think about things like their own networks, and what leverage they can bring to bear on their networks to achieve - when motivated - what they want to achieve. This applied to those who were referred into the pathway but actually could be diverted, e.g. not working so parents getting fed up so going to kick them out - so let's see if we can motivate them to help them sort their problem out.

Many local authorities who took part in interviews regarded their homelessness prevention work, particularly around Early Help services, as a weaker part of their pathway. The principal explanations given were a lack of resources, continuing budget reductions and competing issues (early help being primarily targeted at other groups and issues).

It appears that this particular service area is a difficult one to address within the Positive Pathway. There has clearly been some success, and the survey of local authorities showed that over half of local authorities who had a pathway reported that Early Help was directly impacting on youth homelessness prevention (Figure 3.5). While qualitative interviews revealed that the Positive Pathway Model itself provides the right focus on Early Help and prevention, supported by advice from St Basils Youth Homelessness Advisory Service, there were two general barriers. Firstly, some local authorities were giving less attention to homelessness prevention via their Early Help services and, instead, focusing resources on help at the point of crisis - at the point where a young person presents as homeless. Secondly, aligning services towards homelessness prevention was reported to be difficult to achieve in the current climate of austerity measures.

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[25]The Mayday Trust is currently considering a larger pilot of this initiative throughout England with other voluntary organisations. For an insight, see the video at http://www.maydaytrust.org.uk/delivering-a-personal-transitions-service.

3. Integrated response ('hub' or 'virtual hub') and gateway to commissioned accommodation and support

The Service: Led by the Housing Authority and Children's Services, an integrated service for young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or need help with planned transitions to independence. Housing options and homelessness prevention services come together, often co-located, with other services including support for pathways into learning and work. Underpinned by assessment and including a needs driven gateway into commissioned supported accommodation and flexible housing related support services. This is a key data collection point to inform ongoing development of the pathway.

Desired results:

- Homelessness is prevented wherever possible, for example by supporting young people to stay in their family network or preventing the loss of a tenancy.

- Young people who need accommodation and/or support get it, including quick access emergency accommodation and immediate and ongoing support where needed.

- Young peoples' accommodation and support underpins rather than disrupts their pathways in learning and work.

Source: St Basils

The 'Hub' is a core element of the Positive Pathway Model and all interview respondents saw an integrated hub as being critical to the Positive Pathway Model. Several respondents reported that a lack of an integrated 'front door' for young people in need was at the heart of the issue surrounding inadequate service. For example, one local authority officer explained what not having a hub looked like:

The main problem now is that people can be passed between the services. If they're under 18, it's Children's Services and they might say "Well they're homeless so it's Housing". If we can come up with some kind of joint way of working, and deliver that to staff so that they're aware of [the local authorities] view of how we want to deal with it, then we'll be able to be consistent instead of the customer getting lost.

Local authorities where hubs had been established had witnessed a step change in their ability to respond to younger people facing homelessness, and their overall approach to the issue. As one voluntary sector officer said:

The hub's changed it by making it really clear for young people that they only go to one place regardless of age or the circumstances and we'll bring other services to them. So we've got a worker who'll assess them; who's got access to all children's social care systems. They can request that a single assessment's done. One of the benefits as well is if they're 18-25 we don't look at priority need or non-priority.

[Interviewer]   So you don't differentiate?

No. If they're under 25 and have a housing need and some support need - whether they meet the threshold and priority need status - we'll work with them.

It was apparent that hubs differed. Some local authority areas had well established hubs that provided a 'base' for a range of services tailored for younger people. For instance, in one hub a range of different services were co-located. It included employment and training, mental and physical health services and early intervention services in addition to housing and children's social care. Such hubs had obvious benefits for younger people - being able to access a range of services in one place - but there were other positives. Firstly, where hubs were established, officers believed that they were 'well known' amongst local communities and making this more accessible to those in need. Secondly, the co-location of staff from different organisations and departments meant that a more coordinated response was possible. Officers in two areas explained:

We're all under one roof, we've got those good relationships and we'll go and talk [to other services]. We've got access to that information [from other services]. There are good relationships here and I think that makes it a lot easier for the young person to get a wraparound service.

I think what we do have is quite well integrated - there's good connection between the teams and we're developing that with Housing so there's quite a lot going on to use what we've got more smartly.

In addition, these kinds of hubs had the ability to ensure that tackling homelessness issues for a younger person went 'hand in glove' with remaining in education and training and gaining the skills and chances to gain employment. One voluntary sector officer explained how their hub had developed into a more 'complete' service for younger people:

At [this hub] we don't see the issue as solely a housing issue. Yes, we make sure that the young person's housing needs are met. But it's as important to make sure they've got enough support for their other problems - like mental health, access to some training and employment. We're looking beyond the immediate. If young people are going to go on and be stable, they're going to need jobs, coping mechanisms.

In other areas, hubs were more straightforward and 'slimmer' - but nonetheless effective. These were typically based in a local authority's housing options service and included dedicated officers from housing and children's social care. Younger people would be assessed and determined firstly on whether it was possible to return home or reside with friends and other family members. Where this was not possible, the hub would then ensure that safe accommodation was provided. Of course, 16 and 17 year olds were treated differently in this model - having the option if they were homeless to take a housing route or to become 'looked after' by children's social services.

Interviews with hub coordinators and others involved suggested that hubs had led to positive outcomes. There was evidence that hubs could effectively help younger people to stay within their family networks. Several respondents reported that such prevention work had become possible due to the existence of a hub:

Because it's here, young people know where to come - that there's a service. So we pick up those who are on the edge of homelessness - wanting to move out but no plan for it. We can do an assessment and decide firstly whether it's safe to stay at home or wherever, and then we can link them up with some support to help that happen.

Several respondents also reported that visiting the hub was, for some young people, a 'reality check':

> They've often got little idea that getting a place to live is so difficult - that we can give them a flat and they'll be fine. One, we don't have the properties available, and two, we know from experience that many younger people just aren't ready for living independently.

But for many young people approaching hubs, they had a clear need for emergency and supported accommodation. One key feature of many hubs was that they were the sole entry point to emergency and supported housing for young people. All young people had to be assessed in the hub in order to access accommodation in the pathway. This was a critical aspect of the Positive Pathway Model, and one that was clearly recognised by local authorities who had adopted it.

One of the key outcomes of this was better use of supported accommodation - knowing who was accessing it and whether it was being used appropriately. Many local authorities reported that prior to having a hub in place, there was little or no coordination of supported accommodation. For example, one commissioning officer explained the inadequacies prior to establishment of a hub and a positive pathway:

> People were referred from different routes; there was low needs, high needs, different providers - and no rationale. All well-intentioned, but not joined up. Basically, we had no idea who was using [supported housing]. For commissioners this was a dilemma.

Commissioned Accommodation and Flexible Support (Service Area 4)

4. Commissioned accommodation and support

The service: A range of accommodation and support options designed for younger and more vulnerable young people. Accommodation and support is linked together in some options, for example supported accommodation, Foyers, supported lodgings and Housing First. Flexible outreach support is also available to support young people wherever they live (including in the family home) and stick with them when they move if needed.

Desired results: Young people gain the stability and skills they need, engage with learning and work and move on to greater independence.

Source: St Basils

As the previous section outlined, hubs are a critical element to the Positive Pathway Model, and one that is reported to be highly effective at tackling youth homelessness through prevention, by providing support and by providing a route into safe and suitable accommodation. But to ensure that the latter is possible, a local authority's pathway must have adequate supported accommodation.

The ability to commission 'the right kind of accommodation' was highlighted by many local authorities as a positive outcome. Some officers explained that, prior to implementing a Positive Pathway, they did not necessarily have a shortage of supported and emergency accommodation; rather that it was uncoordinated, and as a result was not equally available to those in need. In one two-tier authority it was reported that the County Council had been commissioning supported housing

without any consultation with its district councils. An officer from another local authority in the process of implementing a pathway reported that they were currently evaluating their accommodation:

> *I think we've got quite a bit of resource; I think it's more about organising that and making sure referrals happen appropriately*

Another officer explained that there had been seven different supported housing providers in the local authority, all of whom were doing different things. While this was valuable, and arguably meant that there was capacity, the officer reported that the situation had some weaknesses:

> *Yes, we had supported accommodation, but was it right? Was it in the right place, serving the right people, serving all those in need? These were the sort of questions that [St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisor] started asking us.*

As this local authority developed its pathway for younger people, it centralised access via a hub and then assessed what kind of accommodation was required:

> *We were short of emergency accommodation in some areas, and we realised that some of the supported accommodation was really unsuitable for younger people. We didn't start from scratch, but we have been shaping what we've got so that it can meet the needs of younger people coming to us as homeless.*

The kinds of supported and emergency accommodation varied. Some local authorities clearly had a greater choice than others - the availability of foyers, hostels, night stops varied greatly by local authority and it was clear that choices were more limited in some cases, particularly in more rural locations. However, there was evidence that implementing the pathway, and improved partnership work between housing authorities and children's social care, was driving innovative solutions and creating new forms of supported housing. For example:

> *I think that the manager from Children's Services was looking at possibly getting some accommodation as like a stepping stone - so something in between very supported into light touch and then into like general needs/independent living, using training flats to try and give someone the opportunity to demonstrate that they're able to manage a tenancy - so I think that came from the Positive Pathway model. So it would be accessing accommodation in Housing but I think led by Children's Services. In the training we were made aware of different ways of looking at it, and what other authorities do and we think 'maybe we could do things a bit differently'.*

Local authorities recognised the need for commissioning suitable accommodation to support a Positive Pathway approach. However, some were concerned that this more coordinated approach could impair the local authority's relationship with the voluntary and community sector - important providers of housing and support for vulnerable people. It was clear that commissioning services were often under pressure from budget reductions and competing demands. While the Positive Pathway Model was improving their knowledge and understanding of younger people's needs and how to meet them, there was also pressure to rationalise by reducing the number of contracts with voluntary and community sector providers. One officer reported the impact that this had had:

> *We re-let our contracts with a couple of the larger providers, but it meant that we lost a couple of smaller providers that we've worked with for a long time and do really good work [with]. I do worry that we lose some of the good supported housing as a result.*

In addition, several officers recognised that voluntary sector organisations were often providing support and housing that was partially funded by non-local authority sources - such as the Big Lottery and charitable giving. Officers recognised that withdrawing their support from the voluntary sector could stymie 'additional resources' that formed an important aspect of their pathway.

One two-tier authority had recognised this issue as its pathway developed. Originally, their pathway contracts were with seven providers and were becoming problematic both in terms of managing the contracts and ensuring that all providers were, *"working in a uniform way and complying with the pathway handbook"*. However, given the rural and dispersed nature of the area, it was important to retain the services of smaller providers who worked in particular locations where other providers never had. Therefore, the County has recently taken a new approach and contracted to one voluntary sector organisation as a lead provider, who then sub-contracts with others to ensure that there is sufficient coverage in each of the district council areas. Officers reported that this was working well, but that it was still early days for the approach.

While some areas appeared to have little problem securing supported accommodation as part of a positive pathway, others were finding this very challenging. Housing market conditions were proving difficult for some local authorities:

> *Housing costs are so high - even in supported accommodation, making it stack up is very challenging.*

All local authorities reported that austerity measures were having a direct impact on the budgets available for supported and emergency accommodation. This was a threat to the number of supported housing units that could be commissioned within a pathway, but also to the *level* of provision. One local authority reported having to limit the availability of supported housing from 24 to 18 months, and another was considering reducing the level of personal support provided through the pathway. It is too early to comment on the impact of such measures, but this is an area for St Basils to be mindful of in the future. Research to assess the impact of funding reductions on youth homelessness would be of benefit to future policy development and local authority budget setting priorities.

The majority of local authority officers and supported housing providers also discussed the impact of proposed changes to bring housing benefit into line with the Local Housing Allowance.[26] When originally proposed by government in the Comprehensive Spending Review of November 2015, there was uncertainty around its impact on supported housing. While there has been some clarifications as to how service charges would be funded and the implementation deadline has been extended, several officers saw this uncertainty as a threat. While there was no evidence to suggest that it was affecting commissioning at the present time, this will be an issue for providers and commissioners in the future.

In summary, it was clear that the Positive Pathway Model has had a direct influence on the supply of emergency and supported accommodation available to younger people facing homelessness. The model has caused local authorities to improve their coordination of supported housing and enable commissioners to respond better to the needs of young people - by providing more appropriate accommodation. However, some local authorities were struggling to provide a range of supported

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[26] For more information, see: http://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/policy-and-lobbying-priorities/welfare-reform/capping-of-social-housing-rents

housing products (and so provide a service tailored to people with different needs). This was particularly the case for dispersed rural areas.

Range of Housing Options (Service Area 5)

5. Range of Housing Options

The service: A range of safe, decent, affordable housing options, shared and self-contained, in the private, social and third sectors. Where the market doesn't provide sufficiently for young people on low incomes the offer will need to be shaped through local housing strategies, using partnerships to create options. This may include creative approaches such as partnerships with learning providers and employers to provide dedicated accommodation that underpins participation in learning and work. Access to flexible outreach support (4) in case young people need it.

Desired results: Young people are economically active and have suitable homes that they can afford - they can build for their future.

Source: St Basils

Of all the five service areas in the Positive Pathway Model, providing adequate 'move-on' accommodation for young people in the pathway *and* providing all young people with a range of affordable housing options was considered to be the most intractable. Even in areas with established pathways, this was identified as a key area of weakness.

> *We've no plans about how we are going to carry out the fifth element of the model. It's the biggest challenge.*

However, all respondents were agreed that this should be identified as part of the Model, and that a pathway would be greatly enhanced by better housing options for young people. In the main, officers pointed to the impact of the country's housing crisis, particularly the shortage of affordable housing, limited choice for younger people in the social housing sector and the inadequacies of the private rented sector. Others also pointed out that recent changes made to the welfare system were making it increasingly difficult for young people to live independently, particulary when they relied on housing benefit to cover all or part of their rent.

In some areas, the social rented housing sector was being used to a certain extent by giving a young person 'priority status' when bidding for properties. This had some positive impact in areas where choice based lettings systems were in operation:

> *They gave all the young people coming through the supported housing pathway a Band 1 - which is really unusual - to recognise that if they were meeting all the criteria for move-on they would then be able to move really quickly. And that's been really helpful actually; I think that has moved people through much more quickly.*

In one two-tier authority, while most district councils operated choice based lettings, one did not, and this had consequences for the younger people in that district. One support provider was asked how easy it was for young people to move on from supported housing:

It depends what area, if you're in [this district council] it's nigh on impossible cos the local authority don't use … choice based lettings. They've still got an old fashioned points based system where it's really not transparent at all. And affordable accommodation [there] is limited - there's a demand for professional lets.

In other areas however, opportunities for accessing social rented housing were very restricted, and local authorities were relying (entirely in some cases) on the private rented housing sector (PRS). Several reported that the Youth Homelessness Advisors had offered them specific training sessions and workshops on making better use of the PRS. However, most officers reported that their local PRS markets were problematic due to poor property and management standards, lack of accessibility (particularly for younger people) and were expensive, with rents above the local housing allowance (LHA) in some cases.

Our biggest issue is the private rental market. [It's] all wildly above LHA. It is absolutely a landlords' market […] nobody will look at young people on benefits even if that's simply that they're on a low income but working. Obviously if you're a care leaver, if you're in full-time education, you're on benefits. So even if you're in a really positive place, actually it's incredibly difficult to get private rented […] so your exit routes [from supported housing] are extremely limited.

It was evident in some local authorities that there was a very limited track record of working with the PRS to provide accommodation for low-income groups. However, some were actively attempting to stimulate the market in the interests of younger people. For example, several housing options teams were regularly attempting to engage local landlords and encourage them to make their properties available. As one officer put it, this was often 'clutching at straws' but it was the best they could do.

I attend private landlord housing forums across the county, I try and chat up landlords and see if they're interested in taking our client group or developing HMOs and that kind of thing. A lot of it's just getting out there and saying we're here, this is the client group, they're not scary, a lot of these young people just need somewhere to live, we won't send you the scary ones cos if you did that you'd never speak to us ever again, so it's being very honest about the client group that we're dealing with.

In some other areas, PRS access schemes existed that could support younger people to access the PRS and provide low-level tenancy support. Not all areas have such schemes, however. In effect, this could be considered a step-down service (from supported housing in the pathway) and some local authorities were considering commissioning this kind of service. One officer from a local authority in the southeast of England reported that move-on and supported accommodation was very hard to find:

One of the things we tried to do in the pathway when we re-commissioned was to have more step-down accommodation, which was designed to do two critical things: it was designed to be as close to the LHA [rate] as possible. Some of our providers have struggled to get anywhere close to it so it's not providing that affordable option and some of them have got it absolutely on the nail. Also, to get that sort of step-down what we've looked at is 4-bed shared houses for example. So in some of the areas in [the county] that's meant acquiring property outside of hostel-type accommodation, and in a number of the areas it's been impossible to do. Even working in partnership with the district, with the RSLs in the area, and working with private landlords, we've got two areas where they simply haven't been able to secure the accommodation.

In some areas, the LHA shared accommodation rate was reported to be largely inadequate to rent a room in a shared house, and additionally some areas were very poorly supplied with shared accommodation.[27] Indeed, many stakeholders talked about shared housing as being the most viable solution for younger people leaving the pathway - because it was the only financially viable solution in high-cost and restricted local housing markets. However, while many officers discussed the need to increase shared housing in their areas, few had much to offer about how this could be achieved. Furthermore, few considered the management skills and resources required to make sharing successful for vulnerable young people. Recent research and learning via Crisis' *Sharing Solutions Programme* highlighted the need for shared housing to be carefully managed and for tenants to be properly supported.[28]

In a more positive light, several officers reported that the implementation of a Positive Pathway in their local authority had given greater focus to younger people when housing strategies were being developed:

> *When we're drawing up a housing strategy, we've got so many competing demands - older people, general needs, families, affordable housing and so on - and it's often been difficult to look especially at the needs of younger people. They've fallen off the radar - put in a box labelled too difficult to solve. If nothing else, having this pathway means that we're taking a fresh look.*

There was some evidence of local authorities contemplating opportunities to provide more innovative forms of housing, specifically geared to the needs of younger people. One example of this was Platform for Life,[29] a capital funding project via the Department of Health to develop low-rent accommodation for young people aged 18 to 24 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and are in housing need, and then provide support to participate in work, further education or vocational training. While two of our participating local authorities reported that they had made an application, neither were successful. In one case, the County Council had attempted to coordinate its district councils to prepare a joint submission, but had failed to achieve the buy-in from 'already overstretched and under-resourced housing strategy departments.

Providing a range of housing options was, therefore, a key challenge for implementing the Positive Pathway Model. However, there is clearly virtue in this being part of the model. There are broad macroeconomic challenges to overcome - the housing crisis and the impact of recent changes to welfare. But too often, it would appear, this stage of the pathway was placed in the 'too difficult' box. The more successful local authorities were attempting to use and foster the social rented sector (via choice based lettings) or the PRS to be more receptive to the needs of younger people. Better 'step down' solutions, the wider use of PRS access projects and the stimulation of well-managed shared housing, can contribute to these ends.

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[27] Shelter provide a number of resources with more information about the local housing allowance: http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/housing_benefit/what_is_local_housing_allowance_lha
[28] See: http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/SharingSolutionsEvaluation_FINAL_web.pdf
[29] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/platform-for-life-guidance-and-allocations

3.4 Summary

This chapter has evidenced three overarching findings:

1. The Positive Pathway Model is a robust framework that can be implemented in a wide range of different contexts - different local authority structures, different housing markets and different geographical areas.

2. Where implemented, the Positive Pathway Model does make a significant impact on youth homelessness prevention and makes significant improvements to the housing pathways of young people who experience homelessness.

3. The financial difficulties facing local authorities pose a risk to the sustainment of existing Positive Pathways, and may limit the ability of more local authorities to establish a positive pathway. However, the Model does offer local authorities the ability to identify the gaps in their provision and think creatively about how to improve their services for younger people by using resources more effectively.

In more detail, this chapter found the following:

- Around half of local authorities surveyed had a specific strategy for tackling youth homelessness (48 per cent); however others covered youth homelessness as part of their broad strategic aims.

- 87 per cent of local authorities reported a lack of affordable accommodation for young people in their area.

- 45 per cent of local authorities were changing their approach to youth homelessness as a result of changes to the welfare state.

- Local authorities identified a range of challenges faced in relation to youth homelessness, including: increasing presentations from younger people with more complex needs; poor access to emergency, supported and affordable housing; poor working relationships between housing authorities and children's social care; and ongoing budget constraints.

- The Positive Pathway Model led to significant improvements in strategic and collaborative approaches to youth homelessness. 80 per cent of local authorities reported that there had been some or major improvement in this aspect.

  - In particular, the Positive Pathway Model and the support from St Basils Youth Homelessness Advisory Service has been a catalyst for better collaborative working between housing authorities and children's social care.

- There was notable variation in the engagement of local authorities in different aspects of the Positive Pathway Model. More local authorities have been improving emergency and supported accommodation for homeless young people and commissioning housing related support for this group. Fewer local authorities are currently providing additional support for young people with multiple and complex needs. However, there was considerable interest amongst several local authorities for innovative initiatives including Housing First, and opportunities arising from initiatives such as the *Fair Chance Fund*, a DCLG and Cabinet Office payment by results programme aimed at homeless young people age 18-24 who are out of learning or work and who's needs were not being met by other services. Specifically, this research has found that;

  - While **information and advice** services exist in most local authorities, it was reported that these can be poor at delivering services to younger people and families. The model had prompted some local authorities to reshape these

services to focus specifically on youth homelessness, but funding reductions and poor access to schools were key limiting factors.

– **Early help** has proved a difficult area to address within the Positive Pathway for some local authorities and there is often some confusion between its role at stage 2 and stage 3 of the Model. Over half of local authorities who had a pathway reported that Early Help services were directly impacting on youth homelessness prevention (Figure 3.5). Some local authorities were giving less attention to homelessness prevention via their Early Help services and, instead, focusing resources on help at the point of need - at the point where a young person presents as homeless. Aligning services towards homelessness prevention was reported to be difficult to achieve in the current climate of austerity measures.

– Local authorities with **integrated hubs** that combined advice, assessment, prevention and access to commissioned accommodation had a clear advantage in addressing youth homelessness. The Hub is, therefore, *the* core element of the Positive Pathway Model, and its implementation leads to the strongest impact on youth homelessness.

– The Positive Pathway Model has had a direct influence on the supply of **commissioned emergency and supported accommodation** available to younger people facing homelessness. The model has caused local authorities to improve their coordination of supported housing and enable commissioners to respond better to the needs of younger people. However, some local authorities were struggling to provide a range of supported housing products. This was particularly the case for dispersed rural areas and for local authorities facing budget constraints.

– Providing a **range of housing options** was a key challenge for full implementation of the Positive Pathway Model, and one that many local authorities felt powerless to influence. The more successful local authorities were attempting to use and foster the social rented sector (via CBL) or the PRS to be more receptive to the needs of younger people. Better 'step down' solutions, the wider use of PRS access projects and the stimulation of well-managed shared housing, can contribute to these ends.

- Overall, local authorities were positive about the impact of the Model. They were most positive about the impact of the model on partnership working and homelessness prevention. In contrast, they were least positive about impact on access to affordable and suitable accommodation. This highlights the strengths of the Positive Pathway model and the limitations - which appear to be related to the wider economic and policy context, rather than the Model itself.

  – Many local authorities reported that the number of younger people becoming homeless as a result of an 'unplanned move' had reduced. In particular, single point access hubs were leading to more people returning home or to moving in with friends and other family members. One area reported that their hubs consistently achieved a prevention rate of around 85 per cent.

  – For 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless, services have become more flexible and more responsive. Many areas reported that children's social care were taking a lead role for this age group and holding responsibility for their housing and care, be it via a housing solution or a looked after solution.

  – Local authorities were using supported accommodation more effectively, aligning it to better meet the needs of younger people.

  – The Model's robust and clear nature, supported by advice and support from St Basils, has been influential in achieving 'senior level buy-in' within organisations - which in turn has driven the model's implementation.

- Implementation of the Model has resulted in good practice. This is being disseminated across England, and being adopted by others. For example, the Welsh Government has adopted a version of the Positive Pathway Model.[30]

- Local authorities who have engaged with the Positive Pathway Model often report becoming more confident in their ability to tackle a problem that, previously, appeared to be intractable.

- Greater impacts were reported by areas that had adopted the Positive Pathway Model as a central ethos, rather than 'borrowing from it' in a piecemeal fashion.

- Pathways, once established, require maintenance and oversight. The role of a lead officer or coordinator was a critical aspect to the sustainment and improvement of the pathway.

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[30]http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/services-and-support/homelessness/youth-homelessness/?lang=en

4

Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

This evaluation has found that the Positive Pathway Model is a robust framework that can be implemented in a wide range of different contexts. We found that Positive Pathways had been implemented in different local authority structures - both in two-tier and unitary authorities. The model had traction in different types of housing markets - from high cost, high demand areas of London and the South East to areas of Northern England where affordable housing was more readily available but access to it by younger people remained difficult. The evaluation looked too at different geographical areas and found that the model was capable of being implemented in urban and rural environments. That is not to say that 'one size fits all'. Local authorities will adapt the model to suit, and because of this and the unique challenge in each local authority, St Basils Youth Homelessness Advisory Service is especially important.

Local authority officers had high regard for the work of St Basils' Youth Homelessness Advisory Service, highlighting their nationally recognised expertise, knowledge and understanding, the ability to influence key decision makers and in so doing forge better partnerships, particularly between Housing and Children's Social Care. In fact, it was clear that the Advisors were playing a key role across the country offering general advice and support on tackling youth homelessness, with the Positive Pathway Model as a foundation. All officers who had engaged with them found the encounter productive. In particular, they have played an important role with local authorities to ensure their compliance with the landmark 2009 G vs Southwark judgement, and a good proportion of their efforts has been advice, support and advocacy to bring about better collaborative working to housing authorities and children's social care departments. The survey found that local authorities regarded the time that the advisors could offer to be reasonable in the main, however the qualitative work revealed that regular informal contact with advisors probably pushed their involvement beyond the two-day free consultation offer. It can be concluded that the Advisors are critically important to the implementation of the Positive Pathway Model in local authorities. Were it not for their efforts, the model would have had less impact.

Where implemented, the Positive Pathway Model does make a significant impact on youth homelessness prevention and makes significant improvements to the housing pathways of young people who experience homelessness. Yet, it is still early days for many local authorities. Organisations are slow to change, and chronicling the impacts of that change requires longer periods than single commissioning cycles allow for. The survey and qualitative enquiry demonstrated that the vast majority of local authorities were aware of the model and many were using it, either as a focussed policy or as a way to improve performance in key areas.

While we can prove clearly that the model has had a significant impact on local authorities in terms of changing and improving their approach to youth homelessness, there is a lack of detailed empirical data on how these changes have impacted on younger people's outcomes (though local authorities have made robust statements that youth homelessness is being tackled more effectively in their areas). There was some evidence to suggest that implementing the model was encouraging local authorities to collect better data and use it more effectively to improve and shape their services. However, there will be difficulties using this data to fully demonstrate improved outcomes for younger people, especially in the shorter term, given the absence of baseline data. Local authorities should continue to be encouraged to improve their evidence base and planned changes to DCLG's system of national homelessness data collection should support this.

The wider financial and policy context in England is creating additional pressure on local authorities in responding to youth homelessness. There are major concerns about the availability of affordable accommodation for young people and increases in youth homelessness in some areas. Local authorities are under increasing pressure to make further reductions to service budgets, and there is evidence that this is having a direct impact on services to prevent youth homelessness. At the same time, Government changes to social housing costs entitlement for single under 35s due in 2019 and in 2017, entitlement to housing costs for the 18 – 21 year old group specifically, is predicted by a wide range of agencies to exacerbate their housing difficulties. These factors pose a risk to the sustainment of existing Positive Pathways, and may limit the ability of more local authorities to establish a positive pathway. However, the Model does offer local authorities the ability to identify the gaps in their provision and think creatively about how to improve their services for younger people by using resources more effectively.

Overall, there appears to be considerable potential to further embed the Positive Pathway Model within local authorities, and doing so will have positive impacts on youth homelessness. Given the challenges faced by younger people in today's and tomorrow's housing climate, we highly recommend that the Positive Pathway Model is pushed harder.

4.2   Recommendations

The Positive Pathway Model is robust, and does not need a major overhaul. The evidence of this rapid evaluation suggests a number of key recommendations.

1. Many local authorities were finding it difficult to provide a range of housing options. But, those taking a more planned, strategic view were looking at influencing their current housing markets to be more responsive to the needs of younger people and seeking out more innovative 'step-down' housing solutions (post commissioned supported housing through their pathways). Also, 'shared housing' was frequently referred to, but without a fuller understanding of how to provide it and (critically) how to manage it. Therefore, the model could be adapted to:

a. Highlight 'step-down' housing arrangements as distinctive from commissioned accommodation

b. Consider a more central role for 'sharing solutions' type housing schemes - PRS access projects (often now known as 'help to rent' projects) who can provide younger people with 'smarter' transition into the PRS, procure and manage shared housing and provide some support to tenants. This will become even more applicable as LHA is introduced in the social rented sector and Housing Benefit entitlement for 18-21s changes.

2. Good practice is being disseminated well by the Youth Homelessness Advisors, and this is often cited as a key benefit by local authority officers. However, it was clear from the evaluation that a more informal network of 'good practice advocates' has emerged - competent officers who have taken on elements of the model and developed bespoke policies and practice within their pathways. St Basils and DCLG should consider:

a. how best to harness these 'good practice advocates' - in a more structured and equitable manner

b. what other outlets for good practice dissemination are there - seminars; e-seminars; a dedicated web-resource; others?

3. The role of the Youth Homelessness Advisors is crucial to the future implementation of the model, but to gain further traction what is the best strategy? The findings of this report point to a number of possibilities:

a. expand the capacity of this service by employing more YHAs

b. expand the capacity by offering more than two days of free consultation

c. take a more targeted approach - by identifying local authorities that have not taken up support and directly inviting them to do so. This would be more effective if DCLG or St Basils were able to identify the local benefits that could accrue to the local authority.

4. Integrated Hubs are the backbone of the Positive Pathway Model, but some authorities perceive that they can be expensive and complicated to deliver; to a point where local authorities are 'put off' implementing one. This is particularly true where Housing and Children's Social Care departments are struggling to work in a more integrated way. Are there ways in which this could be addressed? Perhaps a specific funding scheme or initiative could kick-start this activity in more local authorities.

5. As services became more integrated, local authority officers saw perceptions around housing options changing, especially among 16-25 year olds. But even where local authorities had an integrated hub, it was still felt that more could be done around information provision for young people of secondary school age. Many local authorities reported that engaging with schools was problematic. There may be a need for a more concerted and coordinated effort to 'bring schools on board' with homelessness prevention by involving a range of national and local stakeholders.

6. Although it has not been the direct focus of this report, many local authorities were aware of the work St Basils has done with Barnardo's on developing an accommodation and support framework for care leavers. Local authorities mentioned this work and regarded it as important - seeing it often as the next step (or further development) of their Positive Pathway. It will be worth giving some thought to how these two streams are presented. There may be some

merits to keeping them separate - local authorities may require an established Positive Pathway in the first instance in order to provide a framework for enhancing their pathway for young adults leaving care. In addition, the work to implement a Positive Pathway often leads to much improved working practices between Housing and Children's Social Care. However, there were suggestions that local authorities' rationale for adopting the Positive Pathway Model, and seeking support from the Youth Homelessness Advisors, was directly related to the outcome of a negative Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care, particularly relating to looked after children.

7. Commissioners are influenced by evidence of impact. The Positive Pathway Model may want to be more explicit about the importance for local authorities of collecting and analysing data on the impact that changes have made to youth homelessness.