

Homelessness Prevention for 16/17 year olds and Care Leavers **Young People's Feedback**

In January and February 2018 consultation was carried out with young people using supported accommodation as part of homelessness prevention services commissioned by Devon County Council. This was carried out as part of the needs assessment process for the retendering of a new service for October 2018.

Young people who participated:

A total of 20 young people took part in 5 consultation sessions across the county. All young people consulted were currently being supported by one of the supported accommodation providers, either living in their accommodation or through floating support. Of the young people consulted approximately 45% were male and 55% were female, there was a roughly even split between young people who were 16 or 17 and young people who were 18+ and Care Leavers. Consultations took place at supported accommodation houses in Exeter, Bideford and Newton Abbot, although some young people who attended the consultations were also living in other parts of Devon, e.g. if they were living in their house with floating support or if they were living in a different home with the same provider.

Services young people had used:

All young people taking part in consultations were either currently using or had previously used supported accommodation services. Some young people had only used the provider they were with now and some had used two or more supported accommodation providers on the current contract. Other services that had often been used by young people were:

- Homelessness Prevention Workers/YES Centre;
- Housing Officers or other housing workers in District Councils;

Some young people had also used other services e.g. foster placements or children's homes if they were in care or a Care Leaver, respite or emergency placements, living in shared houses. Some young people had been in one previous placement and some young people had been in many – one young person mentioned 23 previous foster carers. Young people also mentioned that they were accessing support from other agencies with issues that were not directly housing-related but that were helping them address issues that make living independently more difficult, e.g. jobcentre plus, Y-Smart, The Princes Trust, Children's Centres (for young parents).

What has been good about these services?

Some of the things that young people said was good about where they were currently living was:

- Having a safe place to go when they couldn't stay at home;
- Several young people said that the staff where they were living were good and had helped them;
- Some young people said that the house or location they were in was nice (this varied depending on the house they were living in). Things young people liked about the house or location was if it was central to town, if it had good facilities e.g. good kitchens;
- Some young people said that the support they had received was good, e.g. help with filling out forms, getting ready to live independently;

- Once young person said that the support they had had from their Social Worker had been good.

“S has been really good. Checking in, offering lifts, making sure everything is alright.”

From a young person getting floating support after moving out.

What has not been so good?

- Young people with several providers brought up rules around guests or curfews (e.g. guests not being allowed or having to be security checked, some guests not being allowed to stay late). Some young people also said that they didn't feel like they could ask friends back to where they live.
- Some young people said that noise levels at night were an issue, either from other young people in their house or from other houses nearby. Noise from houses nearby was particularly an issue in student areas.
- Some young people said that the location they were in was either too noisy or too remote and they found it hard to get to places (this varied depending on the house they lived in);
- Some young people said the house they lived in was not very homely, e.g. if there were locked doors, having to pay extra to use tumble dryers or other white goods or things being old and breaking (this varied depending on the house they lived in);
- Some young people said that rents were too high to cover on a low wage, e.g. if they were offered an apprenticeship. Some young people said that they had had to turn down or leave jobs to keep their place in supported housing. They also said that high rents or not being able to work meant they had no opportunity to save for when they moved out, e.g. for a deposit;
- Several young people said that it was difficult to get into supported accommodation in the first place. Reasons they gave for this were that it took a long time to get an interview, if they lived in a rural area and couldn't access the District Council or Homelessness Prevention Worker, if they didn't know what support was available, or if they were turned down because of things that had happened a long time ago (e.g. if they were involved in risky situations such as fires when they were much younger);
- Some young people said there needed to be more information about what they are entitled to, especially if they are a Care Leaver as they aren't always aware of it;
- Some young people who were Care Leavers said they had not had a good experience of Social Services, e.g. not having enough contact from their Social Worker or not getting support.
- Some young people said that being in supported accommodation or where they lived gave them a bad reputation;
- Some young people talked about either not being able to move on soon enough, e.g. if they were ready to move out but not 18 yet, or having to move on too quickly when they were 18 if they weren't a Care Leaver.
- Some young people talked about difficulties finding somewhere to move on to, e.g. not enough Social Housing, not being able to get somewhere they could rent privately. Some young people said it was hard to prove they had a local connection to an area, e.g. if they were a Care Leaver, or if they wanted to be close to relatives of a dependent child but it was in a different part of Devon to where they lived before.
- Some young people talked about issues with living in shared accommodation, e.g. noise from other house members or things getting stolen (e.g. food,

toiletries) – this was a particular issue for young people as many of them didn't have much money to buy more if something was taken.

“Some people get more support from other agencies or benefits than others and we don't know why”.

What could we do differently to make housing support services better for young people in future?

- Some young people said they would like more support at the beginning or end of their stay, e.g. when they are moving in or moving out. A number of young people also said that they would like to continue getting some support after they moved out, while they were settling into a new place;
- Young people with several providers said that we should make more information available about what's out there and how you can access it. This applied for both Care Leavers and young people age 16/17 who were not in care.
- Some young people said that it needed to be easier to access services, e.g. if they were coming from a rural area, had had a long wait to get a place, or if they had something in their past which meant they had a high risk assessment – this could make it hard to get a place even if it was years ago and nothing had happened recently. For young people in rural areas this also applied to accessing other services (e.g. jobcentre, District Council) once they were in supported accommodation;
- A significant number of young people, especially young people who were Care Leavers, said that we need to make sure that people keep their promises. This included “Social Workers, Housing Officers, Support Workers, everyone”.
- Some young people who were Care Leavers said that Social Workers needed to be easier to contact e.g. by phone calls, appointments etc. and that they wanted Social Workers to listen to them about what they need;
- Some young people said that there was nothing they would change as it was already working well for them;
- “Don't judge”, “If people have a past record don't just see that – see the whole picture”;
- Some young people suggested things about the houses that could be improved, e.g. if repairs were needed, not charging for the use of white goods if young people already pay a top-up, turning down the heating if it was too hot, fire doors that close too quickly, issues with the wifi;
- “Make it more homely”;
- Making it easier for young people to move on when they are ready, e.g. don't make them wait until they're 18 if they're ready before, and don't stop young people from getting support when they are 18 if they haven't found somewhere else to live yet.

“There should be courses for people like us, e.g. providers should help us to start our own clubs for things like cooking and help with buying ingredients.”

“Make it more homely”.

What support have you had to get ready to live independently?

Some young people said they had had support from their housing provider with:

- Learning how to cook and shop for food;
- Budgeting;
- Support with practical things like registering with a doctor, help with attending appointments at doctors, children's centre, job centre etc. and with filling out forms;
- Learning how to wash clothes and use the tumble dryer;
- Tenancy training and support with how to find a place when they're ready to move out;
- Some young people had had support when they moved out from supported accommodation, e.g. floating support to get settled in a new place;
- Information and advice about drugs and alcohol;

The support young people received varied both depending on the provider and depending on the young person. Several young people told us that we need to remember that they have different skills to start with when they come into supported accommodation – some young people are already good at budgeting, cooking, cleaning etc. whereas others need more support.

Some young people also talked about the benefits to them of peer support and helping each other while they were in supported accommodation.

One young person had not received support to live independently yet, but they had moved into the house quite recently.

“Supporting each other. T is like the ‘Mum’ of the house.”

Do you think young people get enough support to be able to live independently when they leave supported housing? Is there any other support you didn't have that would have helped you?

Some of the support that young people said they didn't have but would have helped included:

- Specific support about practical things they will need to know when they move out, e.g. how to change a lightbulb, more cooking,
- Support with moving on. This was a combination of information about where there is for them to go and there being the right move-on accommodation for them to access where they were currently living. We particularly heard from young people in Exeter that it was difficult to find move-on accommodation;
- Emotional support, e.g. counselling services that understand the needs of young people who are Care Leavers or who have been homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- More support out of hours for things that aren't an emergency but where you just need a bit of help or some emotional support (this varied by provision);
- More support after you've moved out;
- Understanding what their entitlements are, e.g. benefits, and why some young people seem to get more than others;
- Help with starting groups to learn things for themselves, e.g. cooking groups;
- Help with accessing activities outside of the house. This was mainly brought up around affordability of activities (e.g. sports or hobbies) and around transport to get there.

They also said that it was important for us to recognise that young people start out with different levels of skills already. There needs to be more recognition of young people who need extra support, and for young people who are already good at living independently to have that recognised. It is also important for young people to know what help they can ask for, and to go and ask for what they need.

“There could be more options for specific support, such as cooking sessions or practical things like how to change a lightbulb or something.”

“There are some people here who need more support. Some young people are independent but some people don’t know what to do.”

“When you move on you should still get some support.”

What now?

The table below sets out some of the key messages we have had from young people as part of the consultations and what we will do about them.

You said	We will
We need more information about what support is out there and what we are entitled to.	We will talk to District Councils about information that is provided about housing services and whether it can be made more relevant and accessible for young people.
It needs to be easier for young people to access services, e.g. knowing what’s out there and being able to get there if they’re in a rural area.	DCC is developing our Local Offer for Care Leavers, which will let Devon Care Leavers know about what services are available for them. When the Local Offer is developed information will be available on https://www.standupspeakup.org.uk . We will look at how providers can link more closely with Devon’s system for ‘Early Help’ so that young people who have a housing need can be identified more easily and can access support even if they do not have access to the internet and live a long distance from their District Council offices.
There should be more support when you move into and out of supported accommodation.	We will write into the contract more about our expectations of what discussions will happen when a young person comes into supported housing to identify their particular needs and to create a plan for supporting them.
You need to recognise that young people have different levels of skills and needs already when they come into supported accommodation.	We will set out in a new contract what our expectations are around support that young people should receive when they move out, and will try to make the contract more flexible so that young
There should be more support when you move out of support accommodation, e.g. floating support.	

	<p>people who move out when they are 18 can still receive some move-on support, even if they are not a Care Leaver.</p>
<p>Social Workers need to be easier to contact, and to stay in contact with us when we are in supported accommodation.</p> <p>We need to make sure people – e.g. Social Workers, Housing Officers, Support Workers – keep their promises.</p>	<p>DCC is signed up to MOMO – an app which young people in care and care leavers can use to give us their feedback on how we are doing. If you want to raise an issue about services you receive, including Social Services, you can download MOMO and use it to give us your feedback. MOMO can be downloaded from the app store or more information is available on http://mindofmyown.org.uk/.</p> <p>You can also find out about opportunities for young people in care and Care Leavers to engage in our local participation groups and let us know about your experiences on https://www.standupspeakup.org.uk/cicc-meetings/.</p>
<p>Make it easier for young people to move on when they are ready, not be kept waiting because there is no accommodation available or because they aren't 18 yet.</p>	<p>This is about some things that are beyond the control of providers and Devon County Council, so it might need time to address it. We will put into the new contract that we want providers to work with us and District Councils about improving the options for young people who are ready to move on, and will continue to look for solutions once a new contract is in place.</p>
<p>It is difficult for some young people who are Care Leavers to show they have a 'local connection' for social housing.</p>	<p>We will talk to District Council colleagues who work in housing about what can be done to improve this.</p>
<p>It's hard for us to access groups of activities outside of the house – costs and transport.</p>	<p>We will make sure that providers have information about any opportunities we know of that are available for young people to access activities, e.g. if there is funding available or if there are opportunities to access activities through volunteering.</p>
<p>Improvements needed to individual houses or policies about visitors.</p>	<p>Some of these were too specific for us to include in a contract, as they could not be applied to all providers. However, we will ask in a new contract that providers can show us they are regularly meeting with young people to listen to what their issues are and show us what they are doing to address them.</p>

