



# The Role of Housing and Housing Providers in Tackling Poverty Experienced by Young People

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The project undertaken by the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research exploring how housing providers can help support young people facing poverty is now complete and the summary report is available [here](#). The team conducted a [literature review](#), and [case study analysis](#) to identify measures that work in tackling poverty amongst young people (16 to 25 year olds) who do not live in the parental home, with a focus on housing services and the role that housing providers can play. It examined new and innovative practice and sought to investigate the feasibility of implementing such measures across the UK. The research also explored evidence from other countries about schemes that can prevent or alleviate poverty through positive impacts on individual well-being.

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





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

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

A third key question for the research was the specific role that housing providers have to play in addressing poverty. It is widely acknowledged that this is a question which has been under-prioritised by social landlords, who have focused instead on housing provision and relying on housing benefit to mitigate against extreme poverty, an approach that many are now rethinking in the light of welfare reforms and cuts to benefits. All of the schemes explored here were run by housing organisations, and most had initiated the work themselves. However, the role of housing itself within their activities varied. Whilst providing supported housing is clearly a familiar task to housing providers, running apprenticeships and tenancy training courses is not a key activity for most, and these activities can and are provided by other organisations in other areas. The research explored what housing providers were particularly able to bring to this kind of work. One factor was their strong local presence and links with other agencies, having strong links to referral agencies and other sources of support for clients is key to the success of many of the schemes. However, housing providers were less strong at linking into services less closely related to housing, such as education providers, and experienced some difficulties with joined up working in this area, for example over the timing of courses and



apprenticeships. A related factor was housing providers' local presence and reputation among their tenants, including those likely to become their clients. It was clear that several of the schemes were run by organisations that were a known brand locally, and this helped in developing trust with clients. The clients for apprenticeships, traineeships and tenancy training courses were not, however, largely drawn from their own tenant base, suggesting that this role is not critical for the schemes studied.



For the schemes where housing provision was central, the focus was primarily on equipping tenants with life skills to manage more independently in the future. The focus on finding work was not strong in all schemes, though it is in the nature of working with this age group that prioritising education and training opportunities above getting into paid work immediately may be more important to securing higher earnings in the future. Rent levels were important in determining tenants' interest in finding work, with low rents clearly providing an incentive to look for work and maintain a job. In much of the country low rents entail a high level of subsidy (either in cash, or in the form of property being let at sub-market rents), unless the actual market costs of accommodation can be brought down. Shared housing clearly has a key role to play here for this age group, as it has the potential to bring the actual costs down. Some young people from vulnerable backgrounds may struggle to live in shared housing initially and need support to help them, though equipping them with the skills needed to live alongside housemates may be a key way to help them find genuinely affordable housing in the future and thereby reduce poverty. Some additional work conducted by the team into the role of shared housing can be found here.

The schemes included as part of this research demonstrate the broad range of activities undertaken by social landlords to address poverty, although this was not the explicit aim of the schemes. Taking into account the successes, challenges and discussion of these schemes, some broad principles for what works in addressing poverty amongst young people can be identified. Schemes worked well when they were administered by known and trusted



organisations (in relation to young people and project partners), with these organisations working as part of a network of relevant, local service provision. Schemes that worked well provided support that was flexible to individual need and appropriately tailored to different stages of the process, balancing the need for support with the risk of ‘over-supporting’. As part of this, success was found where schemes fostered independence amongst young people, including developing realistic expectations of their life after the scheme.

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