

Housing Related Support (HRS): Post 16 Accommodation For Young People

*'Listening and learning
from the the voices of
young people'*

August 2019

Report by Maura O'Malley
Research & Citizen Insight Team



Essex County Council



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Essex County Council (ECC) are revisiting the way we commission Housing Related Support (HRS) for vulnerable young people that are:

- Aged 16 and 17 years old and at risk of homelessness
- Additional young people aged 18 to 21 years old that are also at risk of homelessness and are assessed as having specific vulnerabilities
- Care Leavers
- Vulnerable young parents up to the age of 21 years old with additional support needs

This service is currently known as the Essex Young People's Partnership (EYPP) and its purpose is to deliver Housing Related Support (HRS), post-16 accommodation and support to these cohorts of young people.

ECC are now looking to what the future model could look like post 2020. To inform decision making it is imperative to gather the 'lived experience' of those young people who are or have been in the EYPP service. The insight gathered in this report will help inform the new service provision for those young people accessing future services.

What did we do?

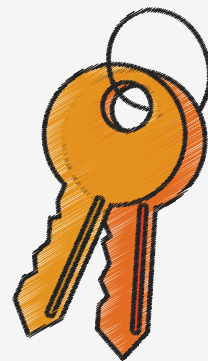
- Held a series of face to face focus groups and 1:1 interviews across all areas of the county with the young people, who were empowered to lead the conversations
- Spoke to approximately 30 young people from all 4 cohorts and some who are now living independently
- Engagement activity carried out jointly by the Research & Citizen Insight Team & representatives from the Children & Families Commissioning team

[Activity carried out between May & June 2019]

WHAT WERE THE KEY THEMES?

Young people need to feel safe & secure

Young people told us that they would like the opportunity to meet new tenants in advance of them moving in to a shared property or facility, and suggested that properties being occupied by the same sex would make them feel safer.



Young people need support around maintaining financial stability

Young people said that being in debt causes them anxiety and prevents them from moving on easily. It is important that when they take on a tenancy they have early and prompt help around benefits with clear advice about what they are expected to pay. This they tell us, would help to prevent them getting into debt. Ongoing rent arrears prevent them from moving on within social housing environment. Young people explained that budgeting is new to them and therefore support could prevent them going into long term debt. Better budgeting will also help them save for things to help them move on e.g. driving lessons, vocational training and travel costs.

Delivering the right support at the right time

Young people told us that the support on offer needs to be flexible to them as individuals and delivered in a way that best suits them at the that time in their life journey.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY THEMES - CONTINUED

Help with life skills and becoming independent

Young people said they often do not feel equipped to manage their own tenancy and would find help and 1:1 mentoring around life skills beneficial e.g. shopping on a budget, food hygiene and preparation, general budgeting and getting around in a new area (often they find they are just sent on a course).

Mental health support

Several of the young people told us that they have poor mental health and say that they need extra support with a range of tasks including help into education and training and getting into and maintaining employment.

The role of an allocated support worker needs to be clear

Some young people can find the role of an allocated support worker difficult to understand and are unclear of what is included within that remit of support. Some young people told us that they do not see their support worker regularly and sometimes find it easier to approach another support worker they trust. Young people stated that there needs to be consistent and fair support provided for all tenants.

Not having a social worker makes it difficult

We were told by some young people that not having an allocated social worker can bring extra challenges in obtaining adequate and timely support and advice. Some young people did not know if they had an allocated social worker.

Moving on is difficult and challenging

Young people said they need practical help to move on from the EYPP service. Acquired debt, including rent arrears, can be a barrier to them being eligible for social housing options. The lack of social and affordable housing causes long delays to moving on. Some young people also felt they still need support after they move on to their own property.

Next steps

It is the intention for insight gathered from this research to better inform commissioners and stakeholders regarding the experiences of young people in EYPP schemes, and using the findings to inform the delivery of future services.





INTRODUCTION

At Essex County Council we are re-thinking the way we commission Housing Related Support for young people that are aged 16 and 17 years old and at risk of homelessness, additional young people aged 18 to 21 years old that are also at risk of homelessness and are assessed as having specific vulnerabilities, care leavers and vulnerable young parents up to the age of 21 years old with additional support needs.

The current service is known as the Essex Young People's Partnership (EYPP). This delivers Housing Related Support (HRS) post-16 accommodation and supports young people by delivering the following elements:

- **Information, Advice and Guidance**
- **Early Intervention and Prevention**
- **Assessment and Support Planning**
- **Risk Assessment and ongoing Management**
- **Integrated Working/Partnership Working**
- **Wraparound Support**
- **Access to and maintenance of education, training and employment/peer mentoring/ support/volunteering**
- **Move-on to independent lives**
- **Emergency Placements**

ECC are exploring future options from 2020 and therefore have an opportunity to engage with the different cohorts of young people who use the service, to gain an understanding of their needs and experiences of moving through supported accommodation and on to independent lives.

We also hoped to gain an understanding of how young people could be affected by emerging issues such as an increased complexity of need, criminal exploitation and mental health issues. Young people have expressed their aspirations to reach independence through having 'their own place' and we wanted to engage with them to explore how partners can better work together to achieve this.

To inform decision making and the development of future options, the Research & Citizen Insight team, working together with Commissioners, organised focus groups directly with the young people across the county to enable ECC to gather as much insight as possible into their needs and aspirations. Through working with the current providers of the EYPP service, the team were able to meet with young people from all relevant cohorts, both in group sessions and on a 1:1 basis.

The engagement activities took place between May and June 2019.





PHOTOGRAPHS

A selection of photographs from supported housing schemes, home to some of the young people who were involved in this research.





THE PROCESS

We needed to gather the views of the four cohorts of young people as defined in the introduction above. Please note other engagement also took place with our operational staff and other stakeholders including providers and the district councils.



METHODOLOGY

This was a countywide approach, we made contact with our current housing providers who set up a series of focus groups across the county, with the majority being at supported housing schemes where the young people live, with two the others at local venues.

Where did we go?

Epping
Chelmsford
Canvey Island



Colchester
Witham
Rochford

Basildon

We hosted **12** informal focus groups and carried out five one to one interviews and in total spoke to around **30** young people.

While the majority of those were living in EYPP schemes we also had conversations with two people who had previously been in a scheme but had now moved on to live independently.

The conversations were led by the young people and facilitated by Commissioning and the Research & Citizen Insight Teams at Essex County Council, no external persons were present during the engagement and this 'safe' approach helped the young people to feel confident talking to us and openly expressing their views.



THE PROCESS

What did we ask?

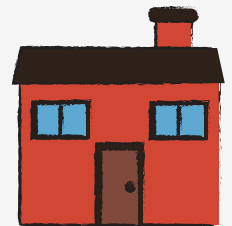
Before moving to a scheme

Where did you live before you moved to your current accommodation?
What has been good about moving?
What has not been so good about moving?



Life at the scheme

How long have you lived here?
Do you like living here? Yes/No
How is it compared to where you lived before?
What type of support do you receive and from who?
What changes has moving here meant for you?
Could you tell me about what your typical day looks like?



Moving on from the scheme

How long do you think you would like to live here for?
What does a 'move on' mean to you? (is this viewed as a positive or a negative; why)
What role do you think your friends and family (and where they are) play in you moving?

Opportunities and aspirations

Have you been thinking about what you could do next/when you move?
Is there anything you would like to do/ learn/go/ join in the next year?
What sort of accommodation would suit you and why?



WHAT DID THEY TELL US?

Moving into a scheme

The timescales for young people to move into an EYPP scheme appeared to vary, with some moving in within days and for others there was quite a delay. Some were placed away from their local area when this was something they did not want to do as they were far away from family and friends. One young person had to give up their job because of the move out of area, while others said properties were in bad repair and not fit for them to move in.

Young people suggested that it would have been beneficial to have had support prior to moving in to the EYPP scheme with things like money management and benefits. It would have also set out clear expectations of what would have been expected from them.

Most young people we spoke with had family or friends to help with the practicalities to move in, however a couple of young people had no support. Feeling secure at the property is very important, one young female told us she was originally housed with four older boys and there were no locks on the bathroom doors, which left her feeling unsafe. While there are life skills courses on offer, some said that the provider needs to encourage take up of the offer.

“It was difficult, I didn’t have a social worker, and didn’t know a social worker could help me, was given a NACRO card, but had no idea it was a rent card, was 15 when moved in.”

“I feel lonely here, but I see my mum every day.”

“I’m not really friends with anyone here.”

Feeling isolated & Lonely

One person said when you move in emotional support would be good as you can often stare at the four walls in your room and become very isolated and lonely.

Ideas from the young people

Hints & Tips Guide

One young person suggested that each property has a hint & tips information sheet with basic information including: libraries, local transport, shops, GP.



Meeting new tenants in advance

Another young person suggested it would be good if there was a system set up for new & current tenants to meet up as a matter of course.

“Living in a xxxxx property basically is having no money, nothing to do – just a bed and nothing else – it can drive you crazy.”





Experience of living in a scheme

To some young people living in a scheme does feel like home and they embrace any planned activity that is happening and are able to form friends; for others they do not want to socialise and tend to keep to themselves.

“Feels like home, walking home.”

While some young people make friends at the schemes, others for whatever reason do not want to socialise and tend to keep to themselves. They told us keeping to a routine is important, while some said they just stay out all day.

Family and friends visiting

One of the main issues raised by the young people was around others visiting and not being able to have friends staying over or younger siblings (under 16) not being able to visit the property (due to insurance issues).

“It’s embarrassing, you can’t have friends over.”

Some of those we spoke to highlighted issues around the anti-social behaviour of other tenants at the schemes and the impact this is having on them and other tenants and this has resulted in the communal areas being closed at some properties for a period.

Some young people talked about the negative experiences of living in a shared housing scheme, including:

- Hygiene & cleanliness problems in shared areas
- Loud through the night
- Arguing
- Personal possessions taken from his/her room
- Residents taking drugs
- Food taken from fridge

Ages of tenants

The difference in ages at the schemes were highlighted with one young person suggesting age is taken into consideration when placing people and highlighted the differences of a 16-year-old compared to that of an 18-year-old, while others spoke about how they had supported younger tenants.

“They should put similar age groups together...16 and 18 might seem close but they are quite different, at 18 you might have left college.”

Several of the young people told us that they experience poor mental health, and this affects their day to day living. They highlighted that they thought that there should be more support available to help get into and stay in employment.

“I shared with a younger girl, I supported her – she couldn’t cook at all.” – another young person commented “she shouldn’t be your responsibility”.





Experience of living in a scheme - continued

Finances

Being in long term debt and rent arrears is a key factor in young people not being able to move on and secure a tenancy, as is clearing the debt and some told us they never had been given any advice on budgeting.



The consensus is that there is a need for clear advice on benefits and budgeting at the right time in their journey as so not to accumulate debt. Having a clearer awareness of money management should better help the young people to prepare to move into adulthood.

Impact on health

They also told us that by being employed means having to pay for prescriptions, so they don't go to the dentist or the doctor and there was one group of young people who agreed that the main aim is basically to just keep a roof over your head and buy food.



Financial impact of being employed

There is often a financial burden on being employed, for example apprentice hairdressers told us they struggle to find the money to buy equipment (i.e. scissors etc), while travel cost to work can also eat into limited finances.

Some of the young people we spoke with were in employment but said they would probably be better off financially if they didn't work as then they would be entitled to housing benefit.

Many of the young people we spoke with have clear aspirations for the future and want to move but felt this was limited by their situation and need to get money to pay rent and bills.

Several of those we spoke to are working, some as apprentices and some have part-time jobs to finance their studies, while some young people are looking for employment, others volunteer.

"Told not to get a job due to housing benefit eligibility, doesn't make sense, but it makes it a lot easier if not working."

"I'm just on study leave as my A-levels start next week. I'm doing 3 A-levels. I have dyslexia...they're giving me extra time in the exams."

"I'm hoping to study to be a paramedic...I need to get a job first though to pay for it."





Experience of living in a scheme - continued

About the young people

Listening to the young people it becomes apparent that they feel they do miss out on opportunities to do things that others of a similar age experience and said this was often due to financial constraints. They told us they want to do things like learn to drive, others go to the gym, to the cinema or go on day trips out, with one person just wanting a house with wi-fi.

"I would love to go to the gym if I had money."



Volunteering gives me confidence

Got a job in London

Want to be a paramedic

We are apprentice hairdressers

I am a trainee as a motor mechanic



Learning to drive opens up more opportunities

Maybe do an evening course, mum could help with the baby

The support staff

The role of the support worker is important, and this research highlights the differing level of service that young people experienced, with many telling us the level of support is often dependant on the individual worker to whom you are allocated, while some tenants felt very well supported others didn't.

One young person felt that it is important to have a "mother figure" around, she expanded on this by saying this being someone that nags you to do and sort things out yourself. She also added that while everything is going well the support is available, but if things deteriorate support is not always available.

"A 'mum figure' is needed – if bad you don't see or hear from them, don't answer calls, broken promises."



Several of the young people were positive about their individual support workers and how they help them deal with their individual life situations and maintain their tenancies and being there as a go to person and someone that will be there, listen and help with getting lives back on track.

The range of support offered includes:

- Help with mental health issues and getting medications right
- Budgeting advice, especially around not getting into debt
- Help with CV writing

"I love it here - they [staff] help you as much as they can".





Experience of living in a scheme - continued

The support staff - continued

However, many of the young people we spoke to were quite negative about the role of their support worker, with some commenting that amount of time supporting tenants seems to be unequal, with some tenants receiving more “support time” than others.

What young people told us about the support services:

- There can be long time lapses between meetings with support workers, sometimes no meetings for up to three or even six weeks
- Need for support workers to be more vocal and “in your ear”
- Sometimes they don’t get on with the support workers and can feel intimidated by them, but changing key worker can help
- They would like to see more help with child care within the properties, as they lose out doing things others their age experience

They also suggested flexible and tailored support:

- Flexible support is needed, both in person and via phone.
- Much more support is needed right at the very beginning of being housed and supported, help is needed when you move in – not increased weeks/months after moving in.

“The support received should include needing someone in my ear telling me/prompting me – things don’t always go in the first few times.”

Moving On

While young people are looking forward to moving on and ‘having their own front door’, they are generally a little scared and apprehensive, however they told us they needed practical help to move on from the including help with the bidding process and this should be followed up by support when they move into new accommodation.

Choice of location is important and though some want to stay in the local area to be near family and friends, others want to move away from what they see as “bad influences”, with some looking for a move out of county. There are also some that want to stay in the area they were moved to under EYPP as they have friends or working/ in education but have no nomination rights (for social housing) in that area.

Other negative influences to moving on are the lack of affordable housing, plus tackling their already acquired debt, including rent arrears.

One of the young people we spoke with had successfully moved with her young child and partner into her own accommodation and to her the best things were her having her own front door and being able to have her own space and privacy.

“I don’t want to stay in xxxxx I don’t even necessarily want to stay in Essex, a lot has happened to me here... somewhere new would be a fresh start.”



Report by Maura O'Malley, Research and Citizen Insight Team

This information is issued by:

Strategy, Insight and Engagement

Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1QH

You can contact us in the following ways:



maura.o'malley@essex.gov.uk

Visit our Council website:

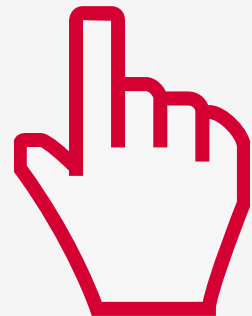
www.essex.gov.uk



[@Essex_CC](https://twitter.com/Essex_CC)



facebook.com/essexcountycouncil



Essex County Council