

Child poverty: improving outcomes for homeless and badly housed children

This short briefing identifies actions local authorities can include in their Child Poverty Strategies to address and mitigate the higher risk of poverty for homeless and poorly housed children.

For ease of reference, this Shelter briefing is organised according to relevant 'building blocks' within the **Child Poverty Needs Assessment toolkit**¹ – a resource your authority will already be familiar with. However, further useful information and case studies can be found in our benchmarking guide *Improving outcomes for children and young people in housing need*.²



Building block 1: Family and life chances

The challenge: What can you do to reduce inequality of outcomes?

Proposed solution: Your Housing and Children's Services can work in partnership to tackle the risk of disrupted education and associated low achievement by:

- ensuring housing providers seek consent to share their client information with local Children's Centres and Education Services when families move into an area
- considering whether school absenteeism is linked to a housing circumstance – eg having to move home or living in poor conditions – and take measures to address this
- giving families priority for accommodation near to their children's school; or, if this is not possible, by giving young people practical support to stay in their existing school if desired, especially around exam times (eg by funding a bus pass)
- using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)³ to identify and meet additional needs homeless and poorly housed children may have.

Building block 2: Place and delivery

The challenge: How will you address hidden pockets of poverty?

Proposed solution: Since living in temporary accommodation is usually expensive and a risk factor for poverty and poor outcomes, you can reduce the need for it by supporting a family threatened with eviction to maintain their existing tenancy wherever possible, by:

- identifying warning signs, such as rent arrears and/or neighbour complaints, at an early stage and intervening to offer tenancy-sustainment support
- addressing underlying issues such as antisocial behaviour and referring a family to Children's Services for help through Family Intervention Projects or Targeted Youth Support
- agreeing and establishing a protocol with all major landlords for families to be offered housing-related support services before eviction is considered
- making sure that Housing Services notify Children's Services of a family threatened with eviction, and that the agreement to do so is written into joint protocols.

The challenge: What can you do to support families in hidden pockets of poverty?

Proposed solution: When a family has to spend time in temporary accommodation, target appropriate services, making sure that:

- local Children's Centres invite and encourage the family to use services, and/or run outreach services for those living in hostels
- the type and location of temporary and permanent accommodation they are offered takes into account the children and young people's need to remain in their existing schools, wherever practical
- affected children and young people can access Extended Services through their schools
- the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used where appropriate, with both Housing and Children's Services being involved in the process.



How to best apply these solutions with at-risk groups

1 Homeless 16- to 17-year-olds

Agree a revised joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services that supports and accommodates homeless 16- and 17-year-olds in light of the Southwark judgment.⁴

Set up a multi-agency monitoring group to collate and analyse outcomes (eg accepted as a 'child in need', returned to family etc), to ensure that there is a common understanding of thresholds for social care intervention, and that the protocol is effective in meeting need.

2 Homeless families

Identify and address support needs where families are in temporary accommodation, using the Common Assessment Framework where appropriate. Ensure that hostel staff and Housing Services personnel are aware of all the services a family can access and the referral process, and they have a solid working relationship with staff in these services (best achieved through awareness sessions, joint training, co-location etc).

3 Intentionally homeless families

Where a family's own behaviour is alleged to contribute to their homelessness, make sure they are referred to support services, to minimise the risk of a 'revolving door' cycle of homelessness. Encourage housing providers' policies on rehousing to be more flexible, ie in offering to rehouse where a family's previous issues are beginning to be addressed.

4 Care leavers

Ensure that a Pathway Plan⁵ is carried out to address the young person's needs, including looking at skills for living independently, such as financial management and responsibilities of being a tenant. Review the support needs if there is an ongoing failure with their accommodation placements.



For more information and recent publications, please visit Shelter's Children's Service web pages:

http://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/childrens_service/childrens_service_publications



Endnotes

1 A Local Government Improvement and Development online resource for individuals or groups designated the lead role in understanding family poverty locally. The toolkit is available at idea.gov.uk

2 To download this guide, go to http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/253238/Improving_outcomes_for_children_and_young_people_a_guide.pdf

3 CAF was introduced in the Children Act 2004 as an assessment tool to aid early identification of need and multi-agency co-operation.

4 In May 2009 the House of Lords made a landmark judgment in the case of R (G) v London Borough of Southwark that affects how local authorities need to provide accommodation and support for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds who present themselves to the authority. For more information, download Shelter's Children's Legal Service briefing by going to http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/231269/G-v-Southwark--ChildrenLegalService_briefing-Nov09.pdf

5 Pathway planning is required by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, and a Pathway Plan enables a young person to give their own views and be involved in the process.

Until there's a home for everyone

In our affluent nation, tens of thousands of people wake up every day in housing that is run-down, overcrowded, or dangerous. Many others have lost their home altogether. The desperate lack of decent, affordable housing is robbing us of security, health, and a fair chance in life.

Shelter believes everyone should have a home.

More than one million people a year come to us for advice and support via our website, helplines and national network of services. We help people to find and keep a home in a place where they can thrive, and tackle the root causes of bad housing by campaigning for new laws, policies, and solutions.

Visit **shelter.org.uk** to join our campaign, find housing advice, or make a donation.

We need your help to continue our work.
Please support us.

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