



## Headlines from Policy Think Tank

### *Young tenants matter: challenges and opportunities for under 35s*

Held at Trafford Hall on 15<sup>th</sup>- 16<sup>th</sup> November 2016

1. Young single people have been **hard hit** by government's decision to reduce Housing Benefit to the level of a single room rent at age 35. This seems **arbitrary** and does not allow for the complex individual circumstances that surround housing need.
2. **Specialist supported accommodation**, which is a lifeline for many **vulnerable young people with complex needs**, is threatened by the **Local Housing Allowance<sup>1</sup> rent cap** from 2019. Although the government has introduced a **new ring-fenced funding model**, it is still unclear how it will be administered and whether it will cover all the additional costs involved in supported housing provision. These costs can be very high – rising to nearly £300 per week in the case of some foyers. Housing options for young people will **shrink even further** when the LHA rent cap will come into force from April 2018.
3. Some social landlords are carrying out **affordability checks**, and turning down young people under 35 who will not be able to afford their rent when the LHA cap will come into force from April 2018.
4. Some social landlords have the view that running affordability checks is wrong, and goes against their core social purpose. They **remain committed** to housing young single tenants and are finding ways around the cuts, sometimes converting their larger properties into HMOs. Riverside are doing this in London.
5. In order to work, Houses of Multiple Occupation need **careful and intensive management and supervision**. Crisis have done some research into successful sharing models and propose ways which sharing can be managed better, such as providing pre-tenancy training, offering a matching service, having a key worker supporting the household and offering a peer-mentor scheme.

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<sup>1</sup>Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates are used to calculate the maximum amount of Housing Benefit private tenants are entitled to, based on the number of rooms each household needs. LHA rates are set by the local authority and are equal to the 30th percentile of rents in each Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) as identified by the Valuation Office Agency.

6. Sharing works best if seen as a **'stepping stone'** in a person's housing career. Sharing can be a useful short-term solution and it can lead to a longer-term solution.
7. Hostel-type accommodation often fails to promote independent living and can "institutionalise" young residents. The **Foyer model** of supported accommodation linked to learning, training and employment, seems to work better but needs to reclaim its original ethos. YMCA Humber is replacing its hostel accommodation with a campus-style new development, providing **training to young tenants on site**, drawing on the model of university halls of residence.
8. **Supporting people into work** is a major aim of many young people's housing providers. They see this as crucial to them becoming independent and moving from reliance on benefits to self-sufficiency. Social landlords can turn young people's lives around by offering them volunteering and paid apprenticeship opportunities, or helping them develop their own small business or social enterprises. Another option is to build training and employment opportunities into procurement contracts.
9. **Pre-tenancy training and ongoing face-to-face support** can make a big difference in equipping young people with the skills they need to manage their tenancies and avoid arrears and other debts.
10. Housing young people is easier if there are **more effective partnerships** with other local support organisations and service providers. Plymouth Community Homes, for instance, has started working with Mental Health England to help young people with mental health issues and signpost them to local agencies.
11. Housing organisations need to **get together, with the backing of their young tenants, and lobby government**, to make sure young people's voices are heard and their particular needs met. **Sharing good practice** amongst practitioners helps providers to find ways around the cuts and promote innovative ways of helping house young people.