

Focus on:

Youth Homelessness

(Homelessness through parental exclusion or relationship breakdown)



Summary of issues:

1. Greater integrated working with partnership agencies is required, in particular the Younger Persons DAT; Children's Services and Mental Health Partnership.
2. Need for preventative awareness raising and educational capacity within schools regarding homelessness so that it doesn't become a 'desired' option for a young person to present to Homelessness teams when they leave home.
3. Need for mediation and family support services to enable effective homelessness prevention work with young people who leave home.
4. Need for direct access emergency accommodation for young people in crisis.

National context:

The cause of youth homelessness is not just about the provision of accommodation:

“Early experiences of homelessness can have a permanent and indelible effect on a young person’s future. The longer term causes of homelessness show that youth homelessness and the wider issue of social exclusion are inexorably interwoven – many having experienced problems at school, drug and alcohol addiction, mental health problems compounded by financial problems and contact with the Police. The research challenges the notion that the only approach to resolving a young person’s situation is to re-house them immediately”

(Source: *Trouble At Home, Crisis Research Summary 2007*)

There are a number of identified risk factors that should be targeted in order to prevent youth homelessness:

- o Difficult family relationships (e.g. poor relationships with parents, running away, parents unable to cope because of mental health or addiction problems, serious arguments with parents – especially if violence involved).
- o An unstable housing history (i.e. moved home frequently or spent periods with different carers).
- o Disengagement with school (exclusion or at risk of exclusion).
- o Poor career prospects and family poverty (e.g. parents out of work and on welfare benefits for extended periods).

(Source: Risk factors are: (Bruegel and Smith, 1999) and others)

The prevalence of mental health disorders in young people increases as quality and security of housing decreases – and there are strong links with mental health issues

There are strong links between homelessness and drug and alcohol dependency.

Criminal activity can be the inevitable and unavoidable consequence of lengthy periods of insecure housing.

A combination of all of the above factors is common.

Solutions proposed were:-

- Services must be flexible and have the ability to meet multiple needs
- Clinical treatment should be made available in settings where young people are found e.g., voluntary sector, housing provision and out of hours.
- Family mediation including respite, befriending and peer mentoring

*(Source: *The Mental Health Needs of Homeless Young People* (report commissioned by Mental Health Foundation written by Jo Stephens, Barnados, August 2002)*

Youth offending and homelessness are strongly linked:

In research published in May 2007, the Youth Justice Board found that young people working with YOS's across the country are likely to have an unstable housing history with most experiencing 2-5 moves in the previous year.

The following key findings were:

- Although under 18, all the young people researched were in housing need including 75% who had lived with someone other than a parent at some time; 40% who were or had been homeless or had sought formal housing provision and/or support (this compares with 1.5% of children and young people in the general population who do not live either with a parent or in a communal setting such as local authority residential care).
- High proportion had been abused (40%); had been in care (49%); had a social worker (71%).
- Accommodation problems often related to difficult or tense family relationships, a number of moves and a considerable degree of impermanence.
- When young people left the family home (whether they ran away, were told to leave or did so of their own accord), they went to one or more of the following places: into 'care'; to stay with another family member; to stay with a friend; a number slept rough for a period of time or go into emergency or temporary accommodation.
- Mixture of needs: 31% poor physical health; 66% felt depressed; 48% felt hungry; 39% felt lonely; 21% were frightened of other people; 15% had been a victim of crime.
- Reasons young people entered temporary accommodation: Following arguments with parents; part of a pattern of disrupted family relationships (which might also have involved periods 'in care'), with moves in and out of the family home over a number of years; as a result of the need for a complete change, usually due to difficulties with one or both parents or a step-parent.
- Reasons why young person was evicted from accommodation: violence or aggression by the young person ("It was necessary to be tough or violent to ensure that no-one harmed or took advantage of you").
- Accommodation on leaving custody: 17% said they had previously left custody without a place to live; 26% of those currently in custody said they didn't have a place arranged to live on their release, but only 2 said they would definitely be homeless on release.
- Specific accommodation issues for young people leaving secure accommodation: Private landlords and B&B owners would not agree to installation of monitoring equipment that can be a court requirement; organising accommodation in advance of release when some LA Housing Services and other providers will not recognise a young person as homeless until they present themselves in person.
- Multi agency working essential – information sharing between Social Services, housing authorities and YOTs so that the most appropriate options are always considered for young people.
- Review young person's housing situation as early in their sentence as possible because many young people experience problems on release from custody, and homelessness applications can take up to 28 days to assess.

(Source: Housing needs and experiences of young people who have offended (Research Commissioned by Youth Justice Board for England and Wales) May 2007).

Previous research has consistently demonstrated complex needs of young homeless people, (e.g. Wrate and Blaire, 1999; Commander et al, 2002; Vostanis, 2002)

- High levels of physical health problems.

- Mental health problems in particular were found to be exacerbated by homelessness (Martijn & Sharpe, 2006) and are likely to persist in the absence of support (Vostanis et al, 1998; Craig & Hodson, 2000; Power & Attenborough, 2003).
- Substance abuse.
- Risk of serious injury.

Family conflict is the main immediate cause of homelessness for most young people:

Key findings:

- Family conflict is the main immediate cause of homelessness for at least 2/3 and possibly up to 90% of homeless young people surveyed.
- Over 50% of those surveyed had left home more than once and 2/3 of those surveyed left home for the first time before they were 16.

Key recommendations:

- **Long term prevention** – identify the young people at risk of homelessness and develop a holistic package of support and implement the joined-up approach required to tackle youth homelessness.
- **Crisis Intervention** – Develop a nationwide network of specialist family mediation services in particular following the extension of priority need categories to 16-17 year olds.
- **Local Authority homelessness strategies** – Ensure that strategies both look at prevention of homelessness amongst young people and encourage the development of a comprehensive needs assessment of young people when they present as homeless.

(Source: Trouble At Home, Family Conflict, young people and homelessness (Randall and Brown, 2007).

Local context:

The Youth Homelessness Innovation Group – a multi-disciplinary group with representatives from across Children’s Services (including Care Leavers), Housing, Supporting People and Youth Offenders Team were drawn together to discuss and make recommendations to the Corporate Management Team about local issues and difficulties in relation to youth homelessness. The work of this group formed an integral part of this Homelessness review and their report is duplicated here:

Summary:

This group reviewed causes and consequences of youth homelessness – and highlighted some key areas of resource wastage, alongside some key gaps in services.

Process:

- o Members of the group met with the CLG Youth Homelessness Specialist Advisor, who reviewed Plymouth’s response to the issue and made recommendations.
- o The group have met twice to discuss joint issues concerning the accommodation of young people who are experiencing difficulties at home, and present to either Children’s Services or Housing Services for support.
- o Group members who are responsible for purchasing services completed the CLG service audit toolkit ‘Preventing and Responding to Youth Homelessness/Ending the Use of B & B for Homeless 16/17 year olds’.

Issues highlighted:

Use of B & B as emergency accommodation for young people: Totalling placements made by Housing, Care Leavers and Advice and Assessment Team, it is estimated that up to 12 young people aged 16/17 reside in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation every night in the city, at high cost.

Lack of any other direct access emergency accommodation: There is currently no other option to accommodating these young people in B & B as there is no direct access emergency accommodation available in the city. CLG commented on early plans developed by Supporting People and the YOS: “The options identified of establishing ‘crash pads’ – either beds in existing services or supported lodgings arrangements – pending the development of your emergency access hostel would be worth pursuing. This would give you the scope to provide respite accommodation whilst assessments and support to return home was explored with young people, and might help prevent them entering a ‘homelessness pathway’ unnecessarily”.

Rough sleepers who aren’t the responsibility of either Housing or Children’s Services: A further 4 – 6 youths will be rough sleeping at any one time – these young people do not meet Homeless or Child in Need criteria and are therefore ineligible for support currently. CLG highlighted concerns around this and the potential for utilising Targeted Youth Support stating “There is specific reference to the importance of working with young people at risk of

homelessness – or who are experiencing homelessness *including those below the usual thresholds for intervention* in the Targeted Youth Support report”.

Preventing high costs that are inevitable after a young person has already left home: No family support or mediation is available to young people who approach Children’s Services or the Homelessness Team for support, and for whom the best option is considered to be returning home. These young people continue to present repeatedly due to family circumstances continually breaking down without support. CLG advise that a large number of these episodes can be prevented with targeted early prevention and awareness raising work in Schools. They advised that “Plymouth is “rather ‘light’ on early intervention and prevention work” and point to evidence that mediation input at the first sign of trouble and prior to the young person leaving home is successful in preventing the majority from leaving home. Evidence also points to the fact that delaying access to mediation until the young person actually presents to support services having left home is less effective. CLG feedback stated “Looking at options to develop early access to mediation is advised. Such services could be jointly funded and provided in partnership with Connexions, Children’s Services or the youth service” and they pointed to real opportunities to develop an integrated approach to youth services in the city.

Shortfall in support for young person to return to family: Plymouth’s guiding principle is that a young person is better off at home where this is safe and appropriate. In addition to the young people supported to return home by the Youth Homelessness Specialist Worker, a further 200 young people are supported to return home to their families by The Zone every year – this work is unfunded by the Local Authority.

Lack of protocols between Children’s and Housing Services: Staff waste time trying to negotiate Children’s and Housing Service’s responsibilities respectively in relation to individual cases because assessments are not joined up. CLG were concerned about this aspect saying “There is currently a need to develop a joint assessment protocol or arrangements with Children’s Services. The provision of assessment/ respite beds might enable more effective engagement with the Advice and Assessment, who could provide mediation and support young people and their parent’s to return home”.

Accommodation options are limited and resources are used ineffectively: Accommodation options are currently being reviewed through the Supporting People re-procurement of young persons services and services for the single homelessness. Through their review of current services, it is already clear that current services are being used ineffectively. For instance Supported Lodgings are not able to provide support for a significant number of people who have complex needs including anti social behaviour, substance abuse, and mental health issues. This leads to poor utilisation of some services, and eviction from accommodation – leading to escalation in rough sleeping levels.

Actions proposed:

1. To review and reallocate current B & B expenditure to the provision of more appropriate emergency accommodation.
2. To ensure that emergency accommodation can be accessed by young people who are not eligible for support by Children’s Services of Homelessness.
3. Input into development of Parent and Family Support Strategy to consider preventative services – and to consider a partnership approach to the need for family support services/mediation to support a young person to return home.
4. Inclusion of a homelessness indicator within the Children’s Trust.
5. Review options and funding to provide targeted information and awareness raising to young people and their parents regarding housing options and the reality of homelessness.

6. Provision of booklet/information for young people (and parents) who are at risk of relationship breakdown.
7. Development of joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services regarding how young people who have left home will be dealt with – including assessment, home visit, jointly funded emergency accommodation whilst young person is dealt with by both agencies etc. The effectiveness of this protocol to be reviewed regularly.
8. To review accommodation options to ensure that they remain appropriate to need and reallocate resources where this is not the case.

Conclusion:

The innovation group uncovered considerable ineffective use of resources in relation to youth homelessness, but this was counterbalanced by areas of under-resourcing which could, if addressed, result in longer term savings by preventing approaches to Housing and Children's Services for support following breakdown of relationship with parents.

The innovation group would therefore recommend that in the short term, at least, costs saved should be diverted into specified areas for greater long-term effectiveness. In addition, the group requests that CMT support the guiding principle that no young person under 18 should be rough sleeping (regardless of whether they meet the threshold for support) and make recommendations for provision regarding the resourcing of this additional area.

Homelessness Prevention by PCC in relation to Young People:

The Young Persons Advisor identified approximately 12 young people per month approach Local Authority with a housing need every month, many of whom have their homelessness prevented by skilled work and negotiation with families to enable a young person to be supported to return home. Where this is not possible, and where a young person is assessed as being unlikely to be able to sustain themselves in an independent tenancy, they are supported to access supported housing projects such as Alma House and The Foyer. As identified in the P1E stats below, an average of only approximately 3 of these 12 people go on to make a formal homelessness approach. More detail regarding work undertaken by the Young Persons Advisor is detailed below.

Approximately 12 people aged 16 or 17 per month approach the local authority for support with housing issues every month, of whom an average of 23% go on to make a formal homeless application identified in the above P1E statistics (almost 3 every month): Plymouth Homeless Persons Unit's specialist young person's advisor reported that 195 young people aged 16 and 17 approached the homeless persons unit for support with accommodation between January 06 and April 07. Of these, 20 were owed a duty under the Children Act 1989 and 30 found alternative solutions and did not make a homeless approach. 23% of the 195 went on to make a homeless approach.

This number has remained consistent over the last 3 years despite different arrangements in previous years for carrying of housing needs assessments involving The Zone – a local agency focussing on meeting the needs of vulnerable young people . Preventative work in Plymouth is targeted on enabling the young person to return home whenever this is safe and appropriate.

These young people had the following additional support needs:

- 40 had a self identified drug or alcohol issue, although only a small number were engaged with support services
- 25 had dependent children or were pregnant
- 20 were working with the Youth Offending Service
- 10 had professional support for mental health issues.

The young persons homeless advisor considered these figures considerably underestimated the level and complexity of additional support needs of 16 and 17 years olds presenting as homeless.

(Source: Plymouth Supporting People Detailed Business Case for the re-procurement of services for young people including young people at risk, 2007).

Homeless approaches by young people - P1E Stats:

	Type	Main Priority Category	Secondary Category
1.3.06 – 31.3.07	16/17 year old	28	8
	Formerly in care aged 18-20	4	0
	Vulnerable due to being in care	1	1
Proportion of young people accepted as statutory homeless	172 of a total of 350 (49%) applications accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need during quarter were aged between 16 and 24 years old.		

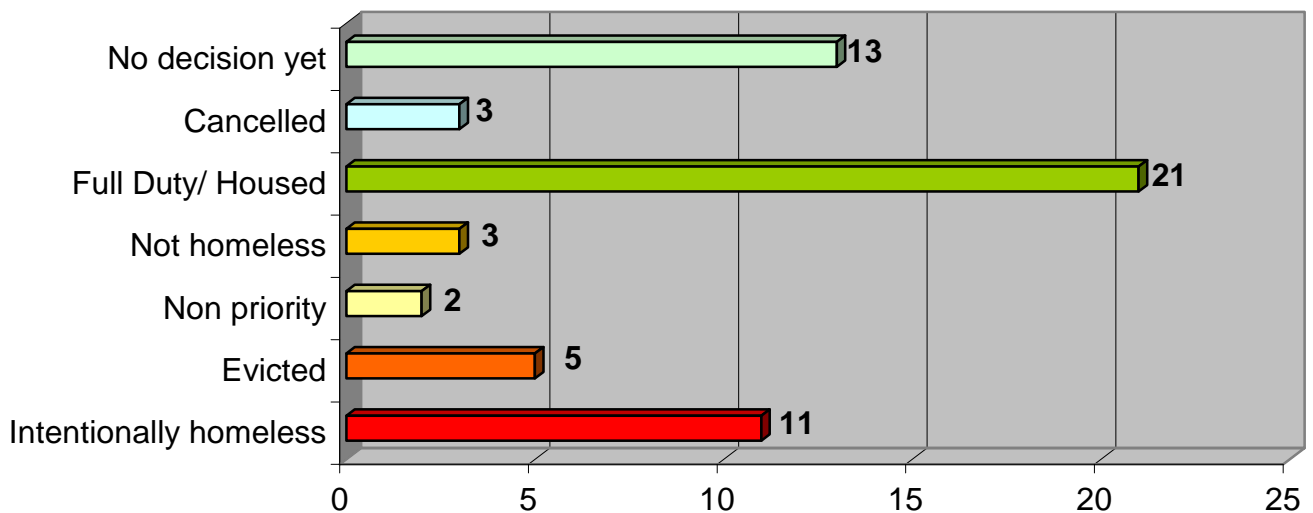
Youth homelessness is a significant issue in the city, with nearly a third of all people accepted as homeless being people between young people.

Total young people accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need during 06/07 = 172, and of these, 36 (21%) were aged 16/17 years old.

The vast majority of young people are accommodated at Clearsprings while their homeless application is being investigated, or as temporary accommodation following a decision being made:

Sample quarter – June to September 2007: 54% (n = 53) of the people accommodated at Clearsprings were aged 16 or 17. A further 28 people were under the age of 25 – so in total, 82% of the people accommodated in Clearsprings were youths.

All those evicted from Clearsprings were aged either 16 or 17, and the following chart illustrates how many 16/17 year olds were found intentionally homeless from this accommodation:



Key points to note are:

- There were 5 evictions in the period, 4 of whom were found intentionally homeless because of their behaviour, and all of whom were aged between 16 and 17 years old.
- Over half of the decisions made resulted in a full duty being accepted or the young person being housed.
- However, about 28% of all decisions made resulted in intentionally homeless decisions. This is in line with overall negative decisions based on intentionality, the rate of which has been climbing in Plymouth on a year by year basis (see previous section).

Placements in B&B as a stop gap measure: Data from the Homelessness Team indicated that that between 1.1.06 and 31.3.07, an average of 6.4 households were placed in B&B accommodation as an emergency measure at the end of each quarter. As the proportion of young people accepted as statutory homeless is approximately 50%, it is reasonable to estimate that at least 3 young people are using B & B accommodation at any one time – though this would only exceptionally be for more than 1 week.

Hostel consultation work with regard to need for emergency direct access provision for young people:

16/17 year olds in need of direct access hostel provision :

Plymouth are responding to the 'Places of Change' agenda by undertaking an extensive service user and stakeholder consultation about direct access hostel provision, which will result in a bid for capital funding for a new innovative hostel in January 2008. The Hostel's Consultation formed an integral part of this homelessness review, and the report is reproduced below:

It is anticipated that the following needs might result in a 16/17 year old requiring access to emergency hostel accommodation:

- Young person found intentionally homeless following eviction from temporary accommodation/supported housing or lodgings.
- Young people for whom there is a period of waiting before appropriate accommodation can be accessed e.g. Foyer, Supported Housing.
- Those who have been evicted by their parents and need somewhere to stay for a short period while preventative work/mediation takes place to support young person to return home where this is appropriate.
- To prevent custodial remands – or as a place to go on release from custody.
- Young people with support needs so high that they are excluded from a variety of resources including School, Supported Accommodation, but are not considered eligible for Social Services/Health/Housing support.
- Young people who have made a homeless approach, and for whom the Hostel is more appropriate than temporary accommodation whilst awaiting a decision/settled accommodation.

Estimating numbers who are likely to access appropriate hostel accommodation is difficult because the numbers of young people currently rough sleeping can only be approximated, and evidence that young people are entering inappropriate and potentially abusive relationships simply to have access to accommodation, is anecdotal.

Data from The Zone would indicate that around 20 16/17 year olds sought advice after a period of rough sleeping, and that in addition there were 6 young people over the course of the year that were evicted from temporary accommodation (with this meaning that they would be considered 'intentionally homeless' – and would require appropriate accommodation. There is some anecdotal information that there have been significant reductions (estimated at around ¼ of former levels) in rough sleeping by young people as a result of a dedicated homelessness prevention approach by the City, but this cannot be confirmed through existing data.

There is also potential for an appropriate direct access accommodation, with support delivered through a multi-disciplinary approach, to be used in place of bed and breakfast accommodation – currently used only in an emergency by Homelessness, Youth Offending Team and Children's Services. Details of Bed and Breakfast use by these agencies are sketchy, but Children's Services alone estimated that they had an average of 1-4 young people aged between 16-18 years old in bed and breakfast at any one time (*Source: Scrutiny Report re. Young Persons Accommodation, September 2006*). Use of such a resource in place of bed and breakfast could therefore result in a significant saving for the City – as well as providing a more appropriate, youth focused resource.

Direct access provision for 16/17 year olds would require an appropriate multi-disciplinary response to be effective, to begin to address needs in relation to:

- Substance Abuse.
- Experience of physical, emotional and sexual abuse.
- Offending behavior.
- Mental ill health.

- Learning disability.

(Source: *Plymouth Direct Access Hostel Needs Analysis, June 2007 – see Appendix III*).

56% of youths dealt with by local drug work agencies had a housing need: Harbour Young Persons Service worked with 105 clients in the year to March 07. Of these 59 (56%) had a housing need. They identified the following causes for young people becoming homeless:

- Domestic violence
- Parental or sibling substance misuse
- Foster placement breakdown
- Family breakdown
- Finances (unable to pay for somewhere)
- Sexual abuse
- Parental mental health

In addition they identified the following problems with existing provision for young people with drug or alcohol issues:

- Easily accessible accommodation for homeless young people
- Suitable temporary accommodation
- Access to supported accommodation
- Respite or crisis accommodation to enable a young person to stabilise and engage in treatment services and be removed from harm. This would require 24 hour support from people able to work with complex young people and health support if prescribing was available.

Young people with offending history

Young people working with the YOS complete a comprehensive assessment that includes how the young person's accommodation contributes to their offending behaviour. A snapshot survey of the young people working with the YOS in June 2007 showed that 60 were assessed as having an accommodation situation, which was strongly or very strongly associated with their offending behaviour.

The YOS, despite good forward planning have between 2-3 young people leaving custody each month with no secure accommodation to go to.

Young people with complex or multiple needs

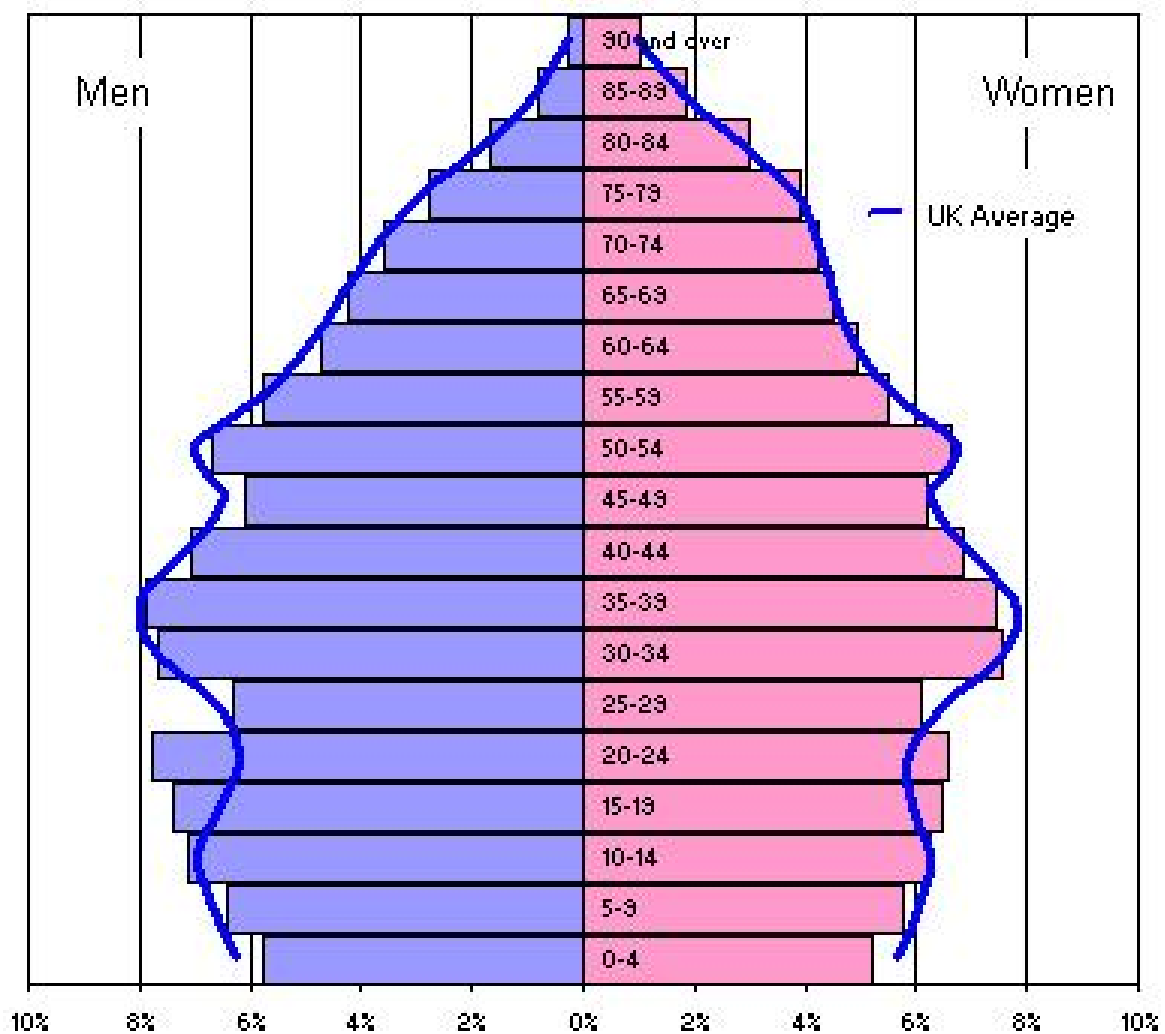
Consultation within a themed 'youth homelessness' workshop within the Plymouth Homelessness Forum and from case study examples supplied by providers indicates that there are a small, but significant number of young people who have support needs that are so high they receive no support at all. The barriers to these young people receiving services include:

- Multiple or complex needs that a single service cannot cope with
- High risk
- Forensic history
- Drug or alcohol issues
- Mental health needs
- Difficult or challenging behaviour

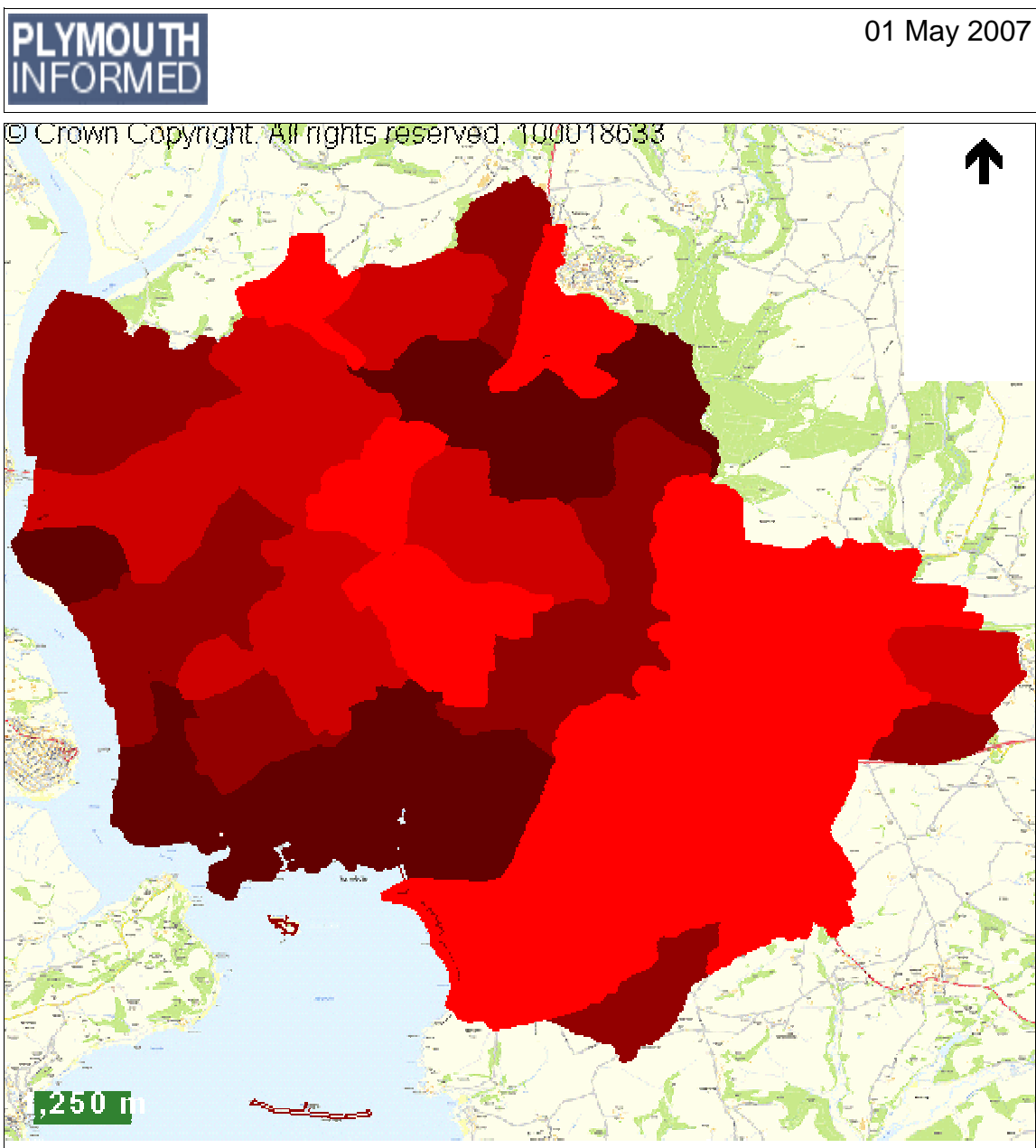
The Census indicates that there are proportionally higher numbers of young people in Plymouth than in the South West or nationally:

As charted below (population pyramid drawn from South West Statistics On-Line) the following features of Plymouth's youth population can be noted:

- Proportion of young people between the age ranges of 16 – 25 is higher in Plymouth than in either the South West region or Nationally.
- 12.8% of Plymouth's population are between these age ranges.
- The proportion of young people in the city returns to average at age 14 and under – which means that though high numbers can be expected to require service provision at present, data would indicate that needs would fall in approximately 2 years, in line with the levelling out of the population.
- There were 6,103 16-17 year olds living in Plymouth at the time of the Census.



Plymouth's young people are concentrated in some of the most deprived wards in the city:



Coordinates at Map
Centre:

Statistics Key:
16 to 24 Years Old



Easting:249975
Northing:56600

Plymouth Informed:
feedback@plymouthinformed.gov.uk
www.plymouth-informed.org.uk



There are high concentrations of young people in City Centre, Stonehouse, Devonport, Mutley and Greenbank, East End, Mount Gould, Derriford, Estover, Barne Barton.